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IN PERSON THE DANDY PASSENGER BY THE DENVER STAGE WAS TALL,
AND, PHYSICALLY, A PERFECT SPECIMEN OF MANHOOD.

BROADCLOTH BURT, THE DENVER DANDY; OR, The Thirty Pardes of Deadwood.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "HERCULES GOLDSPUR," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

KID GLOVES IN DEADWOOD.

FROM the four-horse stage that lumbered into Deadwood one afternoon when that famous place was in its infancy, there alighted a man who commanded more than casual glances from the crowd of loafers who, for want of something better to do, had awaited in the shade of the Full-Hand Casino the arrival of the dust-covered vehicle.

He was still a young man, with fresh, almost ruddy cheeks, a pair of interesting blue eyes, and curly brown hair, which touched a pair of shapely shoulders.

He was rigged out like one who has just emerged from his tailor's; his well-fitting suit of cloth was undoubtedly new, his beaver had a gloss almost capable of reflecting the image of the observer, and his hands were incased in lavender kids as if their owner was on his way to a fashionable ball.

In person this dandy passenger by the Denver stage was tall, and physically a perfect specimen of manhood.

He was dandified in the possession of his gloves, his glossy boots, and his waxed mustache whose ends indicated the location of his ears.

Kid gloves in Deadwood was enough to make the tough crowd smile. It was noticed that this starchy passenger had no baggage of any kind, and a murmur of amazement crept from mouth to mouth as he coolly walked into the open door of the Casino.

"The devil in broadcloth, bet yer boots!" ejaculated one of the crowd. "Tumble my racket! ef he ain't the first bandbox I ever saw on legs. Monarch ov all he surveys, he thinks. Wal, he struck Deadwood just in time to hev them tailor duds soiled inside ov twenty-four hours."

"Who knows him in town?"
"Know 'im? Nobody! He's a butterfly what's out ov his reckonin'—a sheep too fur from the fold ever to git back with all his fleece. We've got no room for daisy blossoms in Deadwood. Hyar comes Paradise Paul. He came up on the stage. Mebbe we kin size the bandbox sport through him."

The person whose coming was eagerly awaited by the inquisitive toughs was the exact opposite of the elegant passenger who was still an inmate of the Full-Hand.

He was a Deadwooder to perfection, rough, uncouth, grizzly-bearded, with pants in his boots, and dust from head to foot; besides, two huge revolvers prominently displayed above the belt that served to keep up his pantaloons.

The man grinned when he saw the intense eagerness and inquisitive eyes of the men who were waiting for him.

"Didn't I bring a dandy jumper back with me, though?" he exclaimed. "Talk about yer fashion-plates, my gentle gazelles; that chap takes the cake."

"Whar's he from?" asked a dozen toughs at the same moment.
"Darned ef I know," answered Paradise Paul, whose name evidently belied his character. "He war enjoyin' a cigar in the stage when I entered it in Denver. I stood it for fifty miles, but I'm not used ter ridin' with a bundle of store goods, so I got out, on top an' roughed it the rest ov the way with Bluff on the box. In them fifty miles he didn't say much; once he asked me ef thar war any good shootin' in Deadwood, an' I told 'im thet, jedgin' from the size ov the graveyard, game war plenty."

"Did you tell him thet, Paradise?"
"Shoot me for an anacondy ef I didn't!"
"An' what did the bandbox say?"
"Oh, he took out another cigar an' remarked thet he allus liked a district whar thar war plenty ov game. Arter thet I climbed up to Bluff, leavin' His Elegance alene."

"He ain't the first darned fool to visit Deadwood. Recollect thet Mormon missionary what came, last summer!"

"The wife-huntin' saint we tied, tarred an' feathered, to his mule?"
"That same moke."
"I recollect 'im."

"Wal, he's back!"

"No!"

"Blamed ef he ain't!"

Paradise Paul looked astonished. In one moment the man in broadcloth seemed entirely forgotten.

"Some human critters an' idiots an' no mistake," he suddenly exclaimed. "I never thought that sanctimonious old Timothy Tenwives would ever venture back hyar. What does he say now?"

"Nobody's interviewed the antiquated heathen," was the response which was supplemented with a laugh. "He came in last night on that same mule, an' hez been viewin' life in Deadwood from the porch ov the Setemup Hotel; an' from the same chair we found 'im in last summer."

"That's unblushin' impudence!" exclaimed Paradise Paul. "Afore night he'll be nosin' around Alice like he did when he war hyar before. I'll inform the Latter Day Saint that his place is in the bosom of his multiplied family, an' not in Deadwood. No plural wife-hunters hyar! no second editions ov Brigham Young shall preach the new-fangled doctrine ov too much family whar we live!"

These sentiments were received with unmistakable signs of approval by the toughs who were ready to take a hand in anything that promised a diversion.

"Cocked in the same chair, is he?" continued Paradise Paul. "He's poked his head into the worst hole he ever found. That'll be ten marriageable widders in Salt Lake afore mornin' ef he gits stubborn. I'll proceed to interview the Latter Day Timothy."

"We'll witness the interview, Paradise," chimed the eager dozen. "Ef thar is to be another suit ov tar an' feathers ter be administered, just draw on the free-born citizens ov Deadwood. You ar' right! No wife-huntin' Mormons hyar!"

Paradise Paul was about to inaugurate a movement on the Setemup Hotel with the crowd at his heels when the handsome figure of the passenger from Denver reappeared in the door of the Casino.

"Thar's yer Jew-shop, Paradise," whispered hose nearest the broad-shouldered tough.

"That's him, boys. Darn me! but he is a handy!" was the reply. "Them blue eyes ov his might flash behind a pistol, but I don't know. Ef he's got such a thing about 'im I never got into it in the stage. Looks to me like he expects to get through on his looks an' his clothes."

Apparently totally unconscious of the observations of the crowd, the man from below coolly lit a cigar ere he left the door, and then stepped outside as he sent a smoke-cloud above his head.

"Where will I find the Setemup?" he asked quietly, addressing Paradise Paul whom he seemed to recognize as his fellow-passenger out of Denver.

"We ar' just goin' up thar," was the instant reply as Paul glanced at the crowd.

"Then I will have an escort," said the broadcloth sport, and the next moment he stood beside Paradise Paul than whom he was an inch taller and a great deal more shapely.

Paradise Paul sidled up to the stranger with an air of arrogance and superiority, and his dusty shoulder touched the soft sleek sleeve.

"Beg yer pardon," he said in mock apology. "Darn me ef I haven't touched yer broadcloth; but one must expect ter be touched when he comes to Deadwood."

The crowd grinned behind the two men, and the new-comer looked from his soiled sleeve o Paul with a twinkle in his blue eyes.

"No harm has been done," he said. "I'll lean up at my leisure. Excuse me, but did I understand you to say in the stage that shootin' was good round about Deadwood?"

The calmness with which the question was put somewhat startled Paradise Paul, and he thought he had detected a certain significant emphasis along the line.

"That war the purport ov my answer," he replied. "Ef ye hev time on yer hands, I'll show ye our graveyard."

"Should be delighted to see it," observed the stranger, and his voice seemed to betray a certain eagerness that he tried hard to conceal. "When I have registered at the Setemup, I'll be at your command."

"He's a cooler; more'n a match fer Paradise!" ejaculated certain members of the crowd in whispers. "He'll git through ef he stays in Deadwood, an' never soil his clothes, either."

For some time after the stranger's last recorded utterance, the crowd moved forward without audible remark.

The expectant countenances of the toughs told that they were approaching the goal.

On either side stood the wooden shanties of the rough-shirted denizens of Deadwood, and every few rods was to be seen the gaudy and generally badly-spelled sign of a saloon.

Almost suddenly, as the crowd turned a corner, the front of a huge wooden building came into view, and at the same time was seen the one figure that occupied the porch in a chair tilted back, and with his feet elevated

above his head against the solid wooden pillar directly before him.

"Thar's the Setemup an' ther meanest man west ov ther Mississippi!" ejaculated Paradise Paul, showing a dark countenance and a pair of flashing eyes as he threw a glance into the face at his side. "Thet Mormon galoot came hyar last summer, an' got a coat ov tar an' feathers, but it seems he wore it out an' is hyer fer another. Shall I introduce ye, er do you know ther 'Postle ov sin—Timothy Tenwives ov Salt Lake?"

At mention of the Saint's name the stranger's eyes became riveted upon him, and then he observed, with a faint smile:

"We may be acquainted. At any rate the name Timothy Tenwives does not sound unfamiliar."

"I should judge not, fer thet sleek spider hez been roamin' all over ther country ropin' respectable women into his net. He's a wolf in sheep's clothin', thet devil-saint is, an' ef you'll stand back, pard, you'll see one ov ther daisiest times Deadwood's hed fer a year."

The imperturbability of the occupant of the porch seemed to disconcert the crowd as it approached the hotel.

Did Timothy Tenwives recognize the dark-skinned toughs who had maltreated him the summer before?

If he did, why did he sit there unconcerned, and see them approach, headed by the same man whose stern voice had once before commanded him never to come back to Deadwood on pain of death?

The Mormon continued to occupy his unconcerned position until the burly figure of Paradise Paul halted within three feet of his elevated heels.

"Back hyar ag'in, eh, Mr. Tenwives?" saluted the Deadwood worthy, smothering with an effort the rage that wanted to drag the apostle of Mormonism from the chair and toss him among the eager toughs behind him. "Been 'bout a year since ye left Deadwood."

"A year the twenty-first of next month," was the calm reply.

"You oughter recollect the date," blurted Paul. "But, see hyer, afore we lengthen ther interview, I want to introduce a gentleman. Mr. Tenwives, this is Mr.— Darn my boots, ef I know myself!"

At that moment the broadcloth sport moved in front of Paradise Paul, and stepped up on the porch.

"I guess we've met before, Timothy," he said, with a smile, as he looked into the eyes of the Latter Day Saint and saw all color leave his face.

"Great Jehosaphat!" almost screeched the Saint, and he would have shot from his chair if the gloved hand of the man from Denver had not held him down. "In the name of Joe Smith's spirit! what brought you to Deadwood?"

"Pretty much the same mission that fetched you, Timothy," was the reply. "Look here; let me whisper in your ear," and the glossy mustache of the Denver sport almost touched the Mormon's ear.

"You are a dead man if you attempt your game here. You know me—Broadcloth Burt!" he whispered.

The next moment the chair was empty!

CHAPTER II.

A. B. M. FROM I-G.

PARADISE PAUL looked into Broadcloth Burt's face like a man suddenly struck dumb with amazement.

Timothy Tenwives, the Mormon, had crossed the porch in one frightened bound and was nowhere to be seen.

"Wal, ef you can't clear a chair quicker'n any galoot I ever saw!" exclaimed Paul. "I'd jes' like ter know what you whispered in thet Saint's ear, but hit's none ov our bizness. Met afore? I should suggest, arter thet brief interview."

Broadcloth Burt was gazing into the apartment beyond whose threshold the Mormon had unceremoniously vanished.

There was an animated expression in his deep-blue eyes which seemed to confirm Paradise Paul's late suggestion that they might flash behind a revolver.

All at once the Denver Sport strode forward, but not in a manner that indicated pursuit.

He had spoken an ultimatum in a whisper, and it was evident that he was content to abide by it and let the actions of the Mormon determine the future.

"A torpedo wouldn't hev raised thet Salt Lake seraph quicker ner thet dandy's words did," declared Paradise Paul to his companions, not a whit less astonished than himself. "It's kinder strange that them two men should reach Deadwood about ther same time. It's a co—co—thunderation! what d'ye call it?"

"Never mind; thet's just what it is, Paradise," was the reply. "Ther two hev met before somewhar, an' the apostle ov the harem got up an' got when the fashion-plate said *git*. We won't git to give the old sinner another mixture ov tar an' feathers now."

"That's to be determined," responded Paul.

"Mebbe Timothy hasn't vamosed the ranch, yet."

Paradise Paul followed Broadcloth Burt into the dark, uncarpeted "reception-room" of the Setemup.

The proprietor of the "oldest and only hotel in Deadwood" had rigged up a clerk's desk of poorly-planed pine and furnished it with a register, whose blurred pages were in keeping with everything else about the room.

Behind the counter stood the owner and proprietor of the Setemup, a rather portly man of fifty, a relic—an unfortunate one, too—of the days of '49, with little eyes like a snake's, fat, flabby cheeks, a mustache and Napoleon, and arrayed in only a shirt and pantaloons, the first mentioned garment collarless, of course.

This was "Colonel" Sandbanks, well known in the early days of California, and one of the characters of early Deadwood.

Broadcloth Burt had exchanged a few words with the landlord colonel, a moment before Paradise Paul's entrance, and he now stood over the register's page, pen in hand.

"Put 'er down in the first white space you can find, major," said Colonel Sandbanks. "You shall have my best room, sir, 'pon honor, an' I shall delight to entertain you, sir. Deadwood ar' beautiful at this season of the year; but you've been heah before? Ov course. Sock down yer autograph anywhar on the page, an' I'll assign you to my most sumpt'ous apartment; will, 'pon honor, sir."

Broadcloth Burt waited until the obsequious landlord ended, and then looked up, with the pen poised in his gloved right hand.

"I may be inquisitive, sir; but who is this last man, my dear colonel?" he asked and his eyes dropped quickly to the page.

"That darned Mormon ov course!" cried Paradise Paul who, backed by a dozen of the crowd anxious to see the fun, stood near the door. "Look hyer, Kernul Sandbanks, didn't you know that we don't 'low that Salt Lake cherub in Deadwood?"

"Wal, yes," asserted the landlord; "but he walked in last night, an' before I had established his identity, his name war down thar, an' thet settled it. I made it a rule years ago, gentlemen, never to erase a man's name from the books ov ther Setemup till he had paid his bill."

"Oh!" ejaculated the Deadwood tough. "This Mormon carpet-bagger is apt ter leave without payin' a red. He's back hyar on the same mission thet failed afore. Thar's no gittin' around thet, kernul. If you expect ter git yer bill out ov thet wife-hunter, ye'd better collect it within the next thirty minutes, for probe me for an ulcer! if such truck shall stay among decent men."

"We'll see, sir," said Colonel Sandbanks turning to Broadcloth Burt. "What was you sayin', sir? Oh, yes. You asked me who wrote thet line under your finger. It's just below the—Mr. Tenwives's, sir. Wal, the owner ov that name, if name it is, came in hyar about an hour ago an' deposited his autograph exactly whar you see it, sir. Kind ov queer, ain't it? What do you make it out ter be? To me I must confess it is a little enigmatical."

The colonel pronounced the last word in a manner calculated to impress all present with his command of the language.

"Thar goes a busted jaw!" grinned Paradise Paul, before the Denver sport could reply to the landlord.

Colonel Sandbanks threw a disdainful look at the speaker and said proudly to himself: "You can't handle a word like that, Paradise."

"What do I make it out to be?" said Broadcloth Burt at this juncture. "It seems to consist of letters calculated to puzzle the uninitiated. I read on the line simply this: 'A. B. M. from I-G.'"

"What's thet?" cried Paradise Paul, striding forward and staring at the page. "Hez another smart Alec come to Deadwood? Whar's thet blatherskite inscription? 'A. B. M. from I-G.' I'd just like ter see the sick kitten what put that down thar. What did he look like, kernul?"

"I recollect that he didn't give me much time to inspect him."

"Oh, you recollect a blamed sight you'd like ter forget," blurted Paradise Paul. "War he a human being or the connectin' link?"

"A man by all means," answered the colonel. "He was no match for you physically, Paradise, from what I saw ov him. He war rayther young, an' had an eye in his head, I can tell you."

"Never saw him before?"

"Never, an' I've been in Deadwood ever since the town was christened."

"Had A. B. M. from I-G., whatever thet means, any baggage?"

"I didn't see any."

The mystery seemed to increase.

"Is he in his room?" persisted Paul.

"No. He left the house before I could assign him."

"I want to see him. 'Rayther young, an' with a keen eye!'"

Paradise Paul turned toward the door.

"Ther's too many blokes comin' to Deadwood, an' they're all gettin' byar at once, too."

He reached the porch, and then wheeled upon the men who still stood by him.

"Suthin's goin' ter happen, suthin' bloody!" he said in a mysterious whisper. "Deadwood's goin' ter hev a time. In the first place the Salt Lake crocodile creeps inter town, then hyar comes a bandbox dandy what knows him, and now the register of the Setemup shows thet another stranger bez arrived. It means somethin'; I know it. That slick cuss from Denver in thar is a cool one. Didn't you see how he lifted old Timothy Tenwives out ov his chair with a word? We've got ter stand together an' play the game ov rule er ruin cl'ar out. Deadwood fer Deadwood's pards, an' no one else! Broadcloth Burt pretends he doesn't know who 'A B. M. from I-G.' is, but since he knowed the Mormon on sight, I doubt it. Pards, we stand together! We'll show this fashion-plate from Denver thet thar's thunderin' good shootin' in Deadwood, an' that our graveyard kin accommodate a few more without takin' in more territory."

The expressions of approval that greeted the conclusion of Paradise Paul's harangue made his eyes glow with a half savage delight.

"Let the Mormon go fer awhile," continued the Deadwood tough. "He's up-stairs now tremblin' under his bed. Ef he gets out ov town without worse than tar an' feathers this time, kick me fer a football. This last individual puzzles me more than the other two. I know who Timothy is—I know that Broadcloth Burt came from Denver; but hyar's a man who writes his name in capitals and tries to act a mystery. Durn me! ef I'll stand it. The deepest mystery in Deadwood shall be made as clear as noonday."

Leaving the crowd to fall to pieces, or remain together, just as pleased its fancy, Paradise Paul turned on his heel and walked rapidly down the narrow thoroughfare among the rough shanties that made up the capital of the Black Hills.

He was the acknowledged leader of the tough citizens of the place, the king of Deadwood roughs, and out of more than one fierce encounter unrecorded on these pages, he had emerged unscathed, but not with bloodless hands.

His lengthy strides carried him rapidly over the ground, and soon brought him before a house in whose open door stood a beautiful girl of eighteen.

This person had blue eyes of the deepest hue, an oval face, with here and there a pretty freckle, and long brown hair which was wealth of itself.

"The stage got in some time ago," she exclaimed, catching sight of Paradise Paul. "I have been waiting for you."

"That makes no difference. I came in on that stage," answered the tough, halting at her side.

"Who else came?"

Paradise Paul looked the girl in the eye before he replied.

"One ov those men who never do Deadwood any good," and he shut his bronzed hands as he uttered the words madly. "Think ov a pair ov kid gloves in Deadwood, Alice," and he laughed coarsely.

"He must be a Denver sport," she suggested.

"That, an' more. Look hyar. Have you seen anybody strange since last night?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you, Alice. These hev got ter be times in Deadwood, when fer the reputation ov the town nothin' must be kept back. I hev told you about the man from Denver. Now who hev you seen?"

"The man you ran off last summer."

"That infernal Mormon wolf!" Paradise Paul's words made up a hiss. "Yes, he is back again, an' on the same mission that fetched him hyar last summer. He wants ter make you the eleventh Mrs. Timothy Tenwives, Alice."

The girl burst into a ringing laugh in which she showed two rows of milk-white teeth.

"You always say that, Paul!" she cried. "What kind of an addition would I make to a Mormon elder's family already ruled by ten quarrelsome women? Just fancy me the eleventh Mrs. Timothy Tenwives! They'd tear me up in five minutes, Paul. There's no danger, I guess."

"The air's full ov it, Alice," warned the Deadwood tough. "You have told me that you have seen that rotten carkiss. Whar war he at the time?"

"He came down-street this morning."

"An' saw you?"

"I think not. I went into the house and closed the door the moment I set eyes on him. He certainly did not see me."

"Those Mormon spiders kin almost see a woman whar thar ain't any. He war spyin' the land then. Alice, you listened to thet Salt Lake leper last summer. He almost made you b'lieve a lie about yer mother. He's hyar with a new stock ov lies, an' he only wants an opportunity to deal 'em out to you. It means suthin' when two such men as Timothy Tenwives an' Broadcloth Burt land in Deadwood about the same time. But thar's a third stranger in town."

"Another wife-hunter?" smiled Alice.

"I wouldn't be surprised," was the answer.

"What's his name?"

"A B. M. from I-G."

Alice looked into the face of Paradise Paul, which had a sober expression, and for a moment threatened to try a second laugh.

"It's no laughing matter, Alice," he said, as his hand stole suddenly to her wrist and fastened there. "I'm going to find out what those letters mean, an' that afore mornin', even if I hev ter force the truth from the man what made 'em at the muzzle ov my revolvers! Why didn't the hound register his own name? Is he ashamed ov it?"

At that moment the Deadwood tough dropped the girl's wrist and uttered an exclamation of wonder.

"The Rockerville stage; an hour ahead of time, too," said Alice. "Look, Paul; there's only one passenger in the old box this time."

Paradise Paul's eyes told that he had already seen the sole occupant of the dingy old stage which had just swung into view and was almost abreast of them.

"It's a woman, Paul!" cried the girl.

At that moment the single passenger leaned out of the stage as if she had caught sight of the two persons in the doorway, and sung out:

"I'm here to stay, my sweet galoots of Deadwood! Oh, I'm the blushin' daisy of the mountain top. An' don't you forget it!"

Alice laughed, but Paradise Paul—he clinched his hands and hissed:

"She here, too? What will the end be now?"

CHAPTER III.

FACE TO FACE.

THE Rockerville stage disappeared in a cloud of dust, but some magnetic force seemed to hold Paradise Paul to the spot.

"Did you know the passenger?" asked Alice.

Her voice broke the spell.

"Know her? I should think I oughter," was the growling answer. "Mebbe I war wishing thet tigress in Frisco, er somewhar else! But hyar she is, ez lively ez a cricket, an' madder'n a hornet. Yes," through his clinched teeth, "I know that woman!"

The beauty of Deadwood did not reply. She saw the mad lightnings that opened up the depths of Paul's eyes and held her peace.

"They all hed to git hyar at once—hyar in Deadwood!" he grated, this time under his breath. "But by the eternal Jove! they can't exist hyar long."

He started off with the last words, and got beyond the reach of the white hand that would have detained him.

"Stay inside the shanty, girl," he sent back over his shoulder, and the next moment Paradise Paul was gone.

The shades of night were gathering once more in Deadwood, and Alice was not permitted to watch the retreating figure of Paul long, for it soon disappeared, and she was the only person visible on the thoroughfare.

"If he knows that woman and hates her," murmured the girl, "something bad brought her to Deadwood just at this time. I know that he never hates for nothing. But I could not help laughing when he mentioned the Mormon's intentions. I Timothy Tenwives' eleventh wife? The idea is too ridiculous," and Alice broke out into a merry laugh all to herself. "I cannot think that the old polygamist would have the temerity to hunt for a wife among the roughs of Deadwood who hate everything Mormon, and who have resolved that none of that sect shall be allowed in the town. Yet he is here, although they tarred and feathered him last summer, and sent him away with a lariat's noose around his neck. The hardihood of some men is beyond comprehension. An important mission of some sort must have brought the apostle of polygamy back to Deadwood."

Yes, Alice, an "important mission" has fetched Timothy Tenwives to the Black Hills capital, and if you knew that you were the cause of his coming, your laugh might terminate abruptly.

What had become of the representative of Mormonism?

The reader had witnessed his sudden retreat from the porch of the Setemup under the potent influence of Broadcloth Burt's brief sentences, and equally familiar to him is the scene that followed the Denverite's invasion of the hotel and introduction to Colonel Sandbank, its proprietor.

We go back to the hostelry for a few moments, for while Paradise Paul conversed with Alice his ward before the door of his cabin, a somewhat interesting scene transpired under the colonel's roof.

Ten minutes after his sudden move from the porch Mr. Timothy Tenwives of Salt Lake found the privacy of his room invaded by a man who entered without announcement of any kind.

The Mormon elder almost sprung to his feet

at sight of his visitor, who was none other than the elegant Denverite, on whose countenance a faint smile was to be seen.

"You beat creation for traveling around," remarked Broadcloth Burt, fixing his eyes on the polygamist. "Can't you enlarge your harem without coming to a section of the country where the life of a Mormon isn't safe for a minute? And don't you know that these people round about you believe that the Mountain Meadows massacre has given them a right to kill Mormons on sight? You certainly know this, Timothy Tenwives."

"And what if I do?" resented the Mormon. "Isn't this a free country, and haven't I a right to leave Utah when business calls me elsewhere?"

"Business!" ejaculated Burt. "You call the enslaving of women *business*, do you?" Broadcloth Burt stepped toward the Mormon as he uttered the last words. "What did I tell you down on the porch? I mean now every word I said then. You came here last summer after a wife, an' you're here again for the same purpose. The best thing you can do is to put Deadwood behind you between two days. Don't attempt to play the game through. You are a dead man if you do!"

Timothy Tenwives did not take his eyes from the Denverite for a moment while he spoke. He sat on the three-legged stool on which he had been surprised by his visitor, and gazed steadily into his face.

"Who told you that I'm on a wife-hunt?" he meekly asked.

"Who had to tell me?" said Broadcloth Burt. "Your very presence here gives you away. You have your eyes on the most beautiful woman in Deadwood; you want to ruin the fairest flower that blooms in the Black Hills country. Timothy Tenwives, you're meaner than the meanest snake that ever crawled. You would take her back with you to a fate worse than death, for, if reports are true, your household is a hell on earth. An' yet you would drag this young girl thither an' make her miserable for life just to gratify your beast-like self. I've never seen the young creature in all my life. Strange as it may seem, this is my first visit to Deadwood, but by heavens! you sha'n't touch her. You sha'n't drag her from her home if it isn't a palace, nor if her guardian is the king of the Deadwood toughs. She's a stranger to me, but she's a woman; that's all I want to know. You'd better go back to your peaceful household, to the bosom of your devoted family. You can't win in Deadwood. I repeat that it may be death for you to try!"

The coolness with which these words were spoken was enough to convince the wife-hunter that he had to deal with a man who, despite his kid gloves and broadcloth, was a man of nerve.

From beneath his dark overhanging lashes he glared madly at the man who had come between him and his purpose, and it was evident from that look that more than threats would be needed to turn him from his purpose.

"Then," he said, in the voice of a cowed and disappointed man, "then I suppose I'll have to go back. But I shall leave Deadwood under protest. I maintain that nobody has a right to interfere with my business."

"They have!" cried Broadcloth Burt. "You forget, old sinner, that human slavery is abolished in this country."

"May the Saints support Timothy Tenwives if his household isn't the abode of love and peace! From mornin' till night sweet affection reigns in all its various apartments—"

"No lies here!" interrupted the Denverite. "You'll need 'em somewhar else. Don't I know that one of your loving wives hung herself in your house, that two more ran off, and that one is in the mad-house? Talk to a stone image about love and harmony in your household, you old scoundrel; but please don't tackle me."

Thus confronted, the Mormon elder seemed to wilt.

"There are always those willing to asperse the character of the good," he whimpered. "I shall not lift my hand against the perverse Gentiles."

"Probably you'd better not. It will soon be dark," and the Denverite stepped to the only window the little apartment contained. "You're not here afoot, I hear, an' that mule of yours can put miles between you an' Deadwood before mornin' if he bestirs himself. It might be healthy for you to move along. This climate isn't a good one for Mormon elders. They're apt to suffer indignities at the hands of those same 'perverse Gentiles.' Somehow or other, that Mountain Meadows business sticks in the craws of the average American, if it did happen years ago."

"I'll go," said the Mormon, rising. "I'll shake the dust of Deadwood from my feet forever."

"If you stay somebody else might shake it off for you."

The man from Denver paused almost abruptly, for his attention had been suddenly drawn to the stage which had just drawn up in front of the hotel.

The window at which the dandy stood looked

down upon the scene, and something seemed to have riveted his attention.

Quick as a flash the eyes of the Mormon appeared to be lit up as with a lightning gleam.

He saw the back of Broadcloth Burt for a moment turned upon him; his hand was quickly thrust into a hip-pocket beneath his coat of rather clerical cut, and as quickly reappeared, clutching a revolver; then he took a quick stride, noiseless, cat-like, forward.

His pistoled hand went up, and he hissed:

"I guess I'll stay and win, after all, Gentile dog!"

The revolver touched the back of the Denverite's head at the words, and the finger pressed the trigger!

Instead of a sharp report, there was only a faint click as the hammer struck.

"One cartridge in a thousand!" said the Denverite coolly, as he wheeled upon the discomfited Mormon, who recoiled with an ejaculation of bitter disappointment. "The next time, Mormon devil, look to your medicine before you administer it. Conclude ter stay, I b'lieve you said? Throw that dropper in you corner, or, by Heavens! thar'll be ten disconsolate widows in the slave-pen to-night!"

One mad stride had carried Broadcloth Burt to the spot to which the now thoroughly alarmed elder had shrunk, and he towered above him would-be assassin like a demon of vengeance.

"Separate yourself from that revolver—quick!" grated the Denverite. "Hang me! if I ain't tempted to kill you whar you stand. I hate a snake what tries to bite a man from behind! I usually crush the head of such reptiles when I find them."

The dandy's words were followed by a thud which was made by the Mormon's revolver as he threw it into the corner.

"The demon of wickedness got the upper hand of me," whined Timothy Tenwives.

"He's had it since childhood. Thar isn't a spark of humanity in you, you Mormon leper. You leave Deadwood inside of an hour. Go back to your household without the eleventh Mrs. Tenwives. I'm going now. If at the end of an hour you ar' to be found under Colonel Sandbanks's roof, yer life won't be worth a snuffed candle!"

Broadcloth Burt turned and left the baffled disciple of Mormonism alone on the field of his defeat.

"Curse that defective shell!" grated Timothy Tenwives as he stared at the door which had closed on the figure of the handsome man from Denver. "The next time I will not fail. Me go back to Salt Lake City without a new wife? I guess not! You don't know me, Denver dandy. I came here for a wife, an' all the powers shall not prevail against me! I've marked the woman and I mean to possess her. You say that you will come back here at the end of an hour. Well, I may not be here, but I will not be on my way to Salt Lake. Deadwood shall have the honor of producing the eleventh Mrs. Tenwives, or we'll know why. If I am a Mormon elder, as you derisively call me, I can hunt a wife and shoot to kill at the same time. Let Denver beware!"

The speaker once more held possession of the revolver he had been forced to cast aside, and his fingers quickly expelled the defective cartridge.

He threw it away with an expression of rage, and filled the steel chamber with one which he felt confident would not fail him.

At that moment a shrill and not unmusical voice came up from below.

"I'm a blushin' daisy from the mountain top. I'm Merciless Maud, the Mormon Exile! An' don't you forget it!"

Timothy Tenwives heard and grew pale.

"My God!" he gasped.

CHAPTER IV.

AN OATH RENEWED.

THE voice came from the porch that fronted the reception-room of the Setemup and not from the interior of the hotel.

The speaker was, of course, a woman, and she was the observed of a small group of interested observers, dark-shirted and dark-faced men, the toughs of Deadwood.

"I've never accommodated such a she alligator as thet, an' hang me if I like to begin now!" said Colonel Sandbanks of the Setemup as he scrutinized Merciless Maud through his little optics. "If she's a mountain daisy, I'll never sigh for a bouquet."

He was speaking of a woman who had reached her thirtieth year, and still bore traces of a beauty which would not vanish entirely while life lasted.

She was of medium hight, and shapely, and looked like an offended queen as she stood in the midst of the curious crowd, and proclaimed in a loud voice that she was Merciless Maud, the Mormon Exile.

Black eyes than hers never burned in a woman's head, and her hands almost as dark as the faces of the Deadwood Toughs, suggested that she was capable of asserting her claims to the title.

The rather flashy dress she wore barely reached to her ankles; her sleeves were tight

and close-fitting, displaying the plumpness of her arms, and her head was adorned with a soft Panama of the sombrero pattern.

She was in the midst of a loud exordium when Broadcloth Burt, who had listened for a moment at the foot of the stairs after his interview with the Mormon, stepped upon the porch.

"I travel wherever I have business, gentlemen," continued Merciless Maud; "an' if business hadn't summoned me to Deadwood, I wouldn't be here. Shall I repeat that I am the Blushin' Daisy?"

"I guess not, miss," interrupted Colonel Sandbanks, who looked disgusted. "If I'm not mistaken you've already announced yerself as that, an' we'll take it fer granted that that's just what yer ar'."

The "Exile" wheeled upon the landlord, and in an instant was looking through him with those piercing eyes of hers.

"Yes, sir, I am all that I claim!" she repeated, lowering her voice. "There's more than one man who will be willin' to swear to it before he dies."

She stopped abruptly, for at that instant she caught sight of Broadcloth Burt who had just emerged from the house.

"Now, gentlemen, there's one of your butterflies!" she suddenly exclaimed looking at the crowd as she pointed at the Denverite. "He toils not, neither does he spin, yet he shines like a fashion-plate, and simpers like a dandy. That man, my smilin' galoots, belongs to no place. Denver knows him as Broadcloth Burt and Cheyenne calls him the Kid-gloved Kid. Look at 'im! Take him in! Six foot in his patent-leathers, gentlemen, an ounce of wax on his mustache, an' a cold-deck somewhere about his clothes. Don't I know the Denver dandy, though? If there's a man 'twixt here an' Salt Lake whose pedigree the Blushin' Daisy doesn't know, I'll give up every trick. Isn't he a picture, galoots? What a delightful chromo he'd make for a milliner shop! Don't let any of his fine points escape yer eyes. It's a free show an' may never be seen after to-night. Thar he stands. Done up in water-colors, but a livin' figger. Talk about yer walkin' chromos. Thet one thar elevates the rag from the bush, or I'm not the Blushin' Daisy of the Mountain Top!"

The dark faces of the woman's auditors wore grins while she spoke, and Broadcloth Burt had good-naturedly struck an attitude with head thrown back, and his thumbs planted in the arm-holes of his vest.

To all outward appearances he seemed to enjoy the scene with the same zest displayed by the crowd of toughs, some of whom were ready to burst into loud guffaws over the woman's words.

"I know him!" she went on. "I've seen him in his palmy days, an' when he didn't know where his next meal was to come from."

A cloud seemed to cross the Denverite's face at the last words; the bolt had, evidently struck home.

"She knows me; that's a fact," he confessed. "I've had my palmy days as that woman calls them, an' I've been down at the heel. Did you come to Deadwood to say this?" And his blue eyes, suddenly animated, met the black orbs of Merciless Maud. "What has your life been? Gentlemen of Deadwood, I've a notion to retaliate. I've known that woman for years. I knew her when she would blush to stand in a crowd of men an' use the language you have heard. I knew her when she was not the Blushing Daisy of the Mountain Top, before the Mormon serpent came—"

A wild and startling cry came from the woman's throat, and with uplifted hand she sprang with the agility of an enraged tigress toward the elegant Denverite.

"We'll quit where we ar'!" she exclaimed. "I've suffered enough at the hands of two men not to have it hurled into my teeth here. Don't go on, Burt. I'm willin' to throw up the sponge for the present. I didn't expect to meet you in Deadwood; but, havin' met you, I've tried to amuse its galoots, an' to have a little fun at your expense."

The face of the woman was colorless now; she was all apology, but still her eyes flashed.

Broadcloth Burt subsided with a knowing glance and a wink at the crowd.

"It's a game two can play at, my daisy," he said to the woman. "I may be a chromo, but the paint will come off if you rub me; so beware!" And without another word he stepped from the porch and walked away.

"Kinder got the best of ye, eh?" ventured one of the crowd to the woman. "He's a dandy an' a jumper, an' he's fresh from Denver."

There was no reply; the eyes of Merciless Maud were following the Denverite, and there was much strange speculation in the look.

Meanwhile, Colonel Sandbanks had managed to slip into the house where he had hastily covered the blank lines of a page of his register with poorly scrawled fictitious names opposite an equal number of equally fictitious rooms.

"No such a tigress as thet out thar shares the hospitalities of the Setemup," he said to himself in explanation of his conduct. "I wouldn't have her in my house for half of Deadwood. The way she did trim that Denver eel down be-

fore them sun turtles was a caution. There's no room for her in this house when she applies. I don't keep a flower garden for blushin' daises; I don't."

But Merciless Maud did not appear to trouble the discriminating landlord of the Setemup, and he sighed when he viewed the well-filled page, and thought of the ingenuity and ink expended for nothing.

Having watched Broadcloth Burt out of sight, she moved toward the edge of the porch, the crowd making way for her, and passed down the narrow street in direction of the Full-Hand Casino, in front of which the first recorded incident of our romance took place.

In less than thirty minutes more night would spread her wings again over Deadwood.

Merciless Maud had doubtless come to the Black Hills town on a mission of some importance. She was not a woman to travel about without an aim, and deep in her black eyes there lurked a light strongly suggestive of vengeance.

"He knows me," she said as she neared the Casino. "This elegant dandy has come from Denver to Deadwood for a purpose. He cannot have got on to my schemes. Nobody knows them but the man who is to help me if I need help, an' I can depend on him. My only fear is that he may get on his mettle an' boast of his name an' deeds. He said he would see me in Deadwood to-night. I did not notice him as I came into town, but one man I did see, an' I'll settle with him before I leave."

Five minutes after these words Merciless Maud stood among the suburbs of Deadwood, her figure casting no shadow now for the sun had set and night once more held sway.

She had halted at what seemed to be the mouth of a gorge through which the stage always passed going to and coming in from Denver.

She was certain that nobody had followed her from the main part of town, for she had looked back frequently while making her way to the spot, and now she seemed to be waiting the appearance of some one who had promised to meet her there.

At last a footstep fell on the woman's ears, and as she started forward with a light cry on her lips, a figure evolved itself from the dense shadows and stood before her—a man.

Merciless Maud looked a moment and then sprang forward, as she cried:

"Bowie Bluff! you ar' here according to promise. The Mormon Exile is ready to take vengeance on one of the two."

"When did the Bad Man from Iron-Grip ever go back on a pard?" was the response which brought a "Never!" from the woman's lips. "I got hyar a little ahead ov you, Maud. I deposited my autograph at ther Setemup when I struck ther town, an' left old Sandbanks starin' at it ez ef I hed jotted it down in gold ink. Got in on ther Rockerville stage, eh?"

"Yes, an' I saw him—standin' before his cabin, with the girl—the blossom whose beauty I have sworn shall wither in the grip of Merciless Maud!"

"Unless I should take a fancy to her!" the man admonished.

"Ah! but you said you would not," exclaimed the woman. "You have promised to assist me in any scheme I saw fit to propose. I am Merciless Maud. Don't let me forget this for one minute. I am here to strike Paradise Paul where it will hurt him most, an' I saw enough as I came into Deadwood to know just where to strike. Desperate as he is, he loves the girl called Alice. Did he recognize me? Yes; I saw him start when I shouted that I was the Blushin' Daisy of the Mountain Top. I saw the other man, too. I held that kid-gloved sport from Denver up for the derision of the toughs of Deadwood; but he turned on me, curse his handsome face!"

"Trod on yer toes with his patent leathers, eh?" grinned Bowie Bluff. "I saw thet band-box sport but once, an' then he walked into the stage an' cleaned it ov about a dozen Mexicans in half a minute. I'm a wildcat from Iron-Grip, Maud; but I hev no particular desire to cross thet deadly chromo."

"Let him run his course here unless he interferes with us," ejaculated the woman. "I am going to strike my blow before daylight. I know where the nest is, and have seen the girl. She is pretty, prettier than her mother, who died under the Mormon devil's roof. Bowie Bluff, we strike Paradise Paul first, then that other villain, that sleek-skinned serpent who completed the ruin Paradise begun. Merciful Father! hear the wronged woman of Blossom Valley!" and the hand of Merciless Maud was lifted appealingly toward the stars. "I have sworn to rest not until I have paid those two villains back for the wreck of my life. I shall keep that oath. One of them is here in Deadwood. He who made me his wife an' then in the dead of winter turned me over to the mercies of a pack of wolves, drove me to the arms of that Mormon wolf who destroys everything he touches, is within reach of my vengeance! He loves at last! They tell me that he would sacrifice his life for the fair

young creature who shares his cabin. I will not let beauty nor innocence stand in my way. I will not dream of mercy till my vengeance is complete. Merciless Maud I shall be to the end, and the game I am to play in Deadwood and elsewhere shall be remembered by men long after I have found the grave where happiness is never wrecked. I will keep my oath!"

Bowie Bluff seemed to hold his breath while the woman before him appealed for the justness of her cause to the unseen power.

"Ah, Bowie Bluff! there *will* come an hour of rest for me!" she cried, as she turned upon him. "The leader of the Deadwood toughs first, an' then back to the nest of the Salt Lake serpent."

The listener smiled.

"We won't hev ter go back, Maud," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because he's hyar now."

"Who is here?"

"The other one—the old ruinator from Brigham's capital."

The hand of Merciless Maud fell on the sleeve of Bowie Bluff.

"In Deadwood?" she cried. "Timothy Tenwives here?"

"Hyar in the flesh," assured the Bad Man from Iron-Grip.

A moment of intense stillness followed the reply.

"Ah! I see," the Mormon wife exclaimed. "One wants to take the Deadwood Angel to Salt Lake, the other to keep her here. We'll baffle them both, Bowie Bluff; an' the man who steps between me an' vengeance dies in his tracks!"

CHAPTER V.

JUST TOO LATE.

EVERYTHING pointed to a lively time in Deadwood before another sunrise.

For more than a week, strange to say, nothing of a very exciting nature had happened to disturb the equanimity of the place; the little cemetery in the suburbs had received no additions to its silent population, and affairs were drifting along in a very humdrum manner.

But now, with the actors in a wild drama ready to play their parts in Deadwood, the curtain threatened to rise on a tragedy in several bloody acts.

The Mormon Exile was evidently a deeply-wronged woman, who, in order to carry out her revenge, would not hesitate to stoop to any act, even if it should afflict the innocent.

Merciless Maud was a character well known in different parts of the new Northwest and along the Mormon border.

Some men looked upon her as a crank, but those who would listen to the story of wrong which she sometimes told always heard enough to convince them that she had suffered at the hands of two men—Paradise Paul, and Timothy Tenwives, the Mormon elder.

And now this woman had come to Deadwood with a deep laid scheme of revenge fully planned in her heart.

She had expected to find Paradise Paul there, but fortune or fate—call it what you will, reader—had brought her face to face with the man she hated most, the wife-hunter from Salt Lake.

We know what Paradise Paul said when he saw Merciless Maud in the stage which had brought her from Rockerville, a mining-camp a few miles southeast of Deadwood.

"She hyar, too?" was his exclamation.

"What will the end be now?"

In an instant, as it were, he seemed to realize that a dangerous woman had come to Deadwood.

While he was planning how to defend Alice, his ward, against the machinations of Timothy Tenwives, it was singular that there should appear upon the scene one whom he had a right to dread.

He knew Merciless Maud at sight; perhaps she had sent him a message that she would come some day, and her coming meant revenge.

With his head filled with thoughts of that woman, he left Alice with a command to retire within the house, and under no pretext show herself at the door again that night.

He walked not toward the Setemup where Merciless Maud was exhibiting Broadcloth Burt to the Deadwood toughs, but to the Full-Hand Casino where he sampled some of the best liquor to be obtained in the place.

"I didn't come back from Denver a minute too soon," he said to himself. "I've got to come out on top in this game ov life an' death, or lose Alice an' everything else. I'll wait fer the boys hyar an' then we'll open the campaign. In the first place, that Mormon snake hev got ter leave Deadwood. What Broadcloth Burt said to 'im scared 'im only to his room; but what we've got ter say shall start him on ther road to Salt Lake, er hell! He kin take his choice."

The hour was early, but a little while after sunset, and the Casino had not begun to fill up with its usual frequenters.

Paradise Paul left the bar and went over to the darkest corner where he threw himself up-

on a rough bench and leaned his elbow on the table in front of it.

"Suthin' struck Paradise hard to-night," remarked the bartender to a customer who was casting wistful glances at the bottles behind the counter.

"Mebbe he saw thet woman ov his."

"Not the wife he bed once?"

"I should pertend ter announce!" asserted the disconsolate tough. "Wal, back she is, bent on playin' holy thunder afore she goes elsewhar. Calls herself the Blushin' Daisy ov ther Mountain Top, er suthin' to thet effect. R'ile her, an' she'd be a whole bokay."

Motionless, in the corner he had chosen, sat Paradise Paul, seemingly oblivious of his surroundings.

His dark chin rested in the hollows of his bronzed hands, and his fingers were buried in his long black locks.

All at once there came to his ears a sound that roused him, and he looked up to see the door of the Casino swing open, and in trooped a crowd of Deadwood toughs, laughing boisterously at something that pleased them.

"Has Paradise been hyer?" exclaimed a dozen, as they caught the bartender's eye.

The captain of the Deadwood men answered for himself by rising and leaving the table.

"We ar' hyer fer duty, Paradise. Thet Mormon skunk still cusses Deadwood with his presence. He will not go unless we ship him. We're just sp'ilin' fer some fun, ov ther natur' we hed last summer when he war hyer afore. Let's noose him this time, an' hang him up ez an example ter all Mormons from Brigham's claim. Say the word, Paradise! We kin lay hands on the woman-hunter in five minutes."

A flash lit up the eyes of Paradise Paul.

"I have sworn that he shall leave Deadwood to-night!" he said, resolutely. "We don't want such truck hyer. This time it shall be worse ner tar an' feathers. We'll make ten women widders at one fell swoop!"

A cheer of exultation went upward from the throats of the toughs.

"All right, Paradise! But you did miss some fun down at the Setemup. Thet woman ov yers hez struck the diggin's ag'in, an' the way she did exhibit thet kid-gloved dandy to our crowd would hev made a weepin' willer laugh! Durn ef it warn't a pictur, Paradise! Got away with old Broadcloth bad, though he pretended to enjoy it. She don't look much like she used ter—kind o' faded like; but thar's a devil in them black eyes ov hers, an' she's now the Blushin' Daisy ov ther Mountain Top."

Paradise Paul seemed to grate his teeth while the tough spoke of the woman who had once been his wife.

"We'll go for thet Mormon elder first," he said. "When we hev made an example ov him, thar may be others thet'll need attention."

His emphasis was pronounced, and seemed to give him a savage delight.

The crowd which had entered the Casino consisted of thirty men who were the desperadoes of Deadwood.

Without a single exception, they were hardened characters who had been attracted to the gold region, not because the precious metal was to be had for the mining, but for the rich pickings to be found at the gambling resorts, and the excitements attendant upon an existence where men carried their hearts on their sleeves and revolvers in their hands.

As naturally as water flows down-hill, Paradise Paul had drifted into the acknowledged leadership of these men, each one of whom loved a fierce affray better than anything else on earth.

It was a companionship which not even the remonstrances of the gentle Alice could break; for once the captain of the Deadwood toughs, always at their head.

This seemed to be a law as unalterable as the decrees of the Medes and Persians.

"Now fer the Salt Lake leper, pards!" cried Paradise Paul, as he threw himself before the gang, and stalked toward the door of the Casino. "We'll find him at the Setemup, eh?"

"Tremblin' fer his hide under one ov the kernul's beds!" laughed the men, and the whole crowd left the den, and took up their line of march for the hotel.

Woe to the Mormon elder if the men of Deadwood were permitted to lay their dark hands upon him.

He would never get to return to the bosom of the delectable family he had left in Mormondom, and his Deadwood wife-hunt would prove his last venture of the kind.

There were several lariats in the crowd, for anticipating Paradise Paul's acquiescence in their proposals, the toughs had prepared themselves.

"No noise, pards," enjoined Paul. "We'll kinder steal a march on the old badger. Colonel Sandbanks won't kick, fer he'll be glad ter git rid ov ther guest he doesn't like ter turn off. This time we mean stern bizness. To-morrer the buzzards kin gorge themselves on Mormon pie, ef they hev a hankerin' after the dose."

Swiftly and as silently as swooping eagles, the vengeful band approached the hotel from

which they expected to drag the Mormon apostle who had committed the unpardonable sin of invading Deadwood in search of a wife.

They reached the house, and Paradise Paul stationed several men in front of it so as to cut off Timothy Tenwives's retreat from the window; then, at the head of a dozen more, he stalked into the reception-room like a lion enraged, and confronted Colonel Sandbanks, who was found in the chair behind his desk.

"We ar' hyer on a bit o' bizness, kernal," said Paradise Paul as the proprietor of the Setemup rose and stared at the rough array that greeted his eyes. "We want thet distinguished spider from Salt Lake."

Colonel Sandbanks seemed to take in the situation at a glance.

His somewhat varied experience with mankind told him that it would not do to parley with his callers; therefore, he waved his hand toward the stair door on his right and said:

"I think he has retired, gentlemen; but as you seem determined to see him you might ascertain the facts by a personal inspection and thus—"

Paradise Paul did not wait for the prolix Sandbanks to conclude, but strode toward the door and flinging it open, bounded up the steps.

There were a dozen men and as many bowies and revolvers at his heels.

Three bounds took the captain of the toughs to the room above, and as he threw himself against the door and burst it open, his stern voice was heard:

"Hyar we ar' ag'in, Timothy! A man who comes back to Deadwood arter once bein' driven out comes back ter pass in his chips. Come for'ard, Mormon rattler, an' take yer medicine like a man!"

The interior of the apartment was not entirely dark; the scanty furniture was visible, but the well-known and badly wanted figure of Timothy Tenwives was conspicuous by its absence.

"He's under the bed, Paul."

The next instant Paradise Paul was on the floor and his eager hand was exploring the dark space beneath the bed in a vain search for the much-wanted Mormon.

Vain, we say, for a minute later the Deadwood giant sprung erect, and with an oath announced to the mad crowd that the bird had flown.

Then ensued a bedlam of curses and violent expressions of rage.

The toughs, not content with their leader's announcement, searched every part of the chamber.

They poked their weapons into every conceivable space, and stripped the bed of its coverings in their eager hunt for the Mormon elder.

But he was not there.

"He hain't got far!" cried Paradise Paul, and down the stairs he went to burst like a thunderbolt into the room below.

"Hang me ef the old eel hezn't wriggled off!" he said as he caught sight of Colonel Sandbanks.

"Gone?"

"Vamosed."

"I'll give him his bill if he'll stay away."

"He'll do thet, you bet, kernal, fer we're goin' ter help 'im!"

Away went Paradise Paul with the swearing toughs at his heels.

One mad cry swelled upon the air.

"Hang the Mormon galoot!"

It gained strength and impetuosity as it sounded throughout Deadwood.

Timothy Tenwives had not more than twenty minutes' start.

The human bounds were sure to overtake him, and then an oath, a noose, and the nearest tree!

CHAPTER VI.

TREATED TO A LARIAT.

SMOOTH the hair of a tiger the wrong way and he will show his teeth.

It was thus with the toughs of Deadwood.

Timothy Tenwives had angered them by reappearing on the ground where he had been forbidden on pain of death to set his foot.

Paradise Paul knew that the beauty of Alice, his ward, had drawn the wife-hunter from Mormondom to the Black Hills, and he had sworn a terrible oath that the old schemer should not succeed.

"He'll give Alice up when we get the lariat round his neck!" he exclaimed as he led the gang of roughs after the Mormon. "Death to the Salt Lake serpent! That's the motto, pards. We'll twist his neck an' widow the hull harem he's left behind!"

The wild excitement continued to increase.

The toughs were determined that the scheming Mormon should never go back to his own country to scheme anew for the possession of the young girl who had inflamed his baser passions.

"Twenty minutes' start ain't much fer a galoot what's got ter trust in a mule," said Paradise Paul to his discomfited crowd. "We'll take to the hosses, an' run the old hound down in a jiffy!"

There was a rush for the few horses corraled among the suburbs of Deadwood, but Paradise Paul turned toward his own cabin.

"I'll tell Alice that I'm goin' off fer a spell," he explained. "I won't be gone long, ov course, but while I am away she must keep inside."

He was not long in reaching the cabin, and a moment later he uttered an exclamation of surprise, for he stood in a little room of which he was the only occupant.

"I'm too late!" fell from his lips. "That infernal Mormon has taken Alice!"

If Timothy Tenwives had visited the giant's cabin he had also accomplished his purpose.

The house was empty; Alice was gone!

The little tin lamp that burned on the table revealed the interior of the cabin, and suddenly snatching it up he went up a ladder that led to an opening overhead, as if he expected to find the lost girl there.

"Gone an' no mistake!" he growled, rage almost blistering his eyes as he came down again. "Now, won't thar be the old Harry to pay when we catch that Mormon Satan? Got the child at last, hezn't he? But we'll foller him ter Salt Lake City, but what we git her back. Fer thet girl I'm willin' ter cut my way through all the Mormons thar. You'll pay fer this steal, Timothy! By Heaven! I'll throw a gleam ov daylight through yer head a long distance this side yer woman-pen!"

He rushed madly from the house, leaving the light on the table, but he had not proceeded ten steps ere he stopped and then recoiled from a figure that had confronted him.

At the same moment his bronzed hand shot toward the hilt of his bowie.

"So you haven't found the Mormon?" said the person confronted by the giant.

"Wal, no, but we'll get thar."

"Not to-night, mebbe."

"Before daylight, by the eternal!" grated Paradise Paul. "Look hyar, Broadcloth Burt, I don't know what brought you up from Denver, an' just now I don't care. Take a squint in thar," and stepping back suddenly, the speaker threw open the cabin door. "Thet shanty war inhabited by the belle ov Dakota an hour ago: now whar is she?"

Paradise Paul turned upon the Denverite as if he would force from him a satisfactory reply.

"I see she isn't here now," said the dandy calmly. "Mebbe she's gone visiting."

"Gone—thunder!" roared the giant. "She would be thar now ef it warn't fer one mean skunk. I am satisfied that whar Timothy Tenwives is at this minute, thar is Alice. What is she to me? A good deal, Mr. Denverite. Thar's no blood ov mine in her veins, but she's dear to me all the same. Don't you know that those Mormons hev no conscience? That monster what came hyar yesterday after Alice drove her mother mad years ago, an' now he wants the daughter. I never told Alice this because I never had the heart to. He has got her at last. In spite ov all my watchin' over her, I've been tricked by a cold deck in the hands ov thet Mormon skunk."

"I regret your loss, but men like Timothy have to be watched."

"Watched? more than that! They've got to be killed," grated Paradise Paul. "Cold lead is the only remedy for this Mormon leprosy. Alice in the hands of that fiend? It boils my blood! But the boys ar' waitin' fer me at the corral. They've got the hosses ready for the hunt. We won't bring him back, Broadcloth; but we'll leave him whar we find him. You wouldn't like to go along, Denver?"

"I believe I will."

"Come on then."

When Paradise Paul turned to rejoin his pards, he was accompanied by the elegant man from Denver.

There was a flash of eagerness in the dandy's eyes, and he soon seemed as anxious to reach the horses as the Deadwood giant.

"Worse an' more ov it, boys!" grated Paradise Paul, appearing suddenly to the crowd who had the horses ready for the chase. "The nest war empty when I got thar. The Mormon cleaned it out an' left."

"An' we've made a diskivery, Paradise," was the answer. "The old fellar left his mule behind."

"An' took two good hosses?"

"Two good 'uns."

Paradise Paul shut his swarthy hands and swore.

"Hyar's a pard what wants ter jine in the hunt," he said, waving his hand toward Broadcloth Burt. "He didn't come hyar ter hunt humanity, but ez I told him in the stage that shootin' war pretty fair round about Deadwood, I'd like ter prove it. Denver an' Deadwood ar' pards, anyhow, so an extra hoss fer Broadcloth Burt."

In less than three minutes an extra horse was ready for the Denverite, and when mounted, he presented a striking contrast to the rough men by whom he was surrounded.

"We'll catch 'em on ther Denver trail," said Paradise Paul. "Come, my Mormon-lovers! I hev sworn that an elder's neck shall be broken before mornin'!"

A loud cheer which attested the spirit of the hard crowd greeted the giant's words, and the whole gang galloped off, led by Paradise Paul, who burned to lay hands on the representative of Mormonism.

It was night, of course, but not dark, for myriads of stars lit up the expanse of heaven, and the Deadwood toughs could distinctly see the trail over which they rode.

"Halt!" suddenly said Paradise Paul, and the whole set drew rein. "I heard a hoss ahead."

They were five miles from Deadwood and well among the hills.

Had they overtaken the Mormon elder and his captive so soon?

"We've come up with suthin'," continued Paul as he slid from the saddle and cocked his revolver. "If it should be Timothy Tenwives, the stars above us shall see him swing."

Paradise Paul crept forward, leaving his pards in the trail where they had halted, and five minutes later all heard his hail:

"I've caught the boss thief, boys!"

There was a rush for the spot, each one eager to be first, for Paul's voice had told all that he had come up with the Saint.

"Hyar's yer delectable sinner," exclaimed the Deadwood giant, as he held out at arm's-length to his followers the well-known person of Timothy Tenwives. "I caught the old cat nappin' an' stole one ov ther cutest marches on 'im you ever saw. Uncoil thet lariat at my saddle. Thar's a handy tree hyar, an' we'll widder the Salt Lake harem in less than ten minutes."

In an instant the man thus captured stood within a circle of cocked revolvers.

He looked frightened and his cheeks were quite pale.

Paradise Paul had, indeed, stolen a march upon him, for confident that he was far enough from Deadwood to rest a spell, he had dismounted and was sleeping, propped against a boulder at the edge of the trail.

The capture had been attended with no danger, for the Deadwood giant had crept upon the sleeper, clapped a revolver against his face and awakened him with an exultant oath.

"No beggin', no blubberin'!" warned Paradise Paul, sternly, to the Mormon. "You came back hyar ag'in' orders. It war death fer ye to show yer face ag'in in Deadwood. Timothy Tenwives, we ar' the court an' the law. Thet mule ov yers warn't fast enough, so ye hed ter steal a hoss. Thet's death in this kentry. But whar's yer other prize?"

The Mormon gave the speaker a quick, inquisitive glance.

"No innocence game hyar," hissed Paradise. "Whar is Alice?"

"I don't know."

A derisive laugh from the whole crowd greeted this reply.

"A liar to the last," said Paul. "We mean bizness. Think ov goin' from Dakota to ther Judgment Bar ov heaven! You took the girl."

"I left her in Deadwood for all I know," was the reply. "If I had taken her would I have been caught here asleep?"

"But you took two hosses?"

"That animal yonder is the only one of which I robbed Deadwood to-night, and I left one in its place."

"A durned old mule! But you say that you didn't abduct Alice?"

Up went the Mormon's hands.

"I swear it!" he said, solemnly. "I was fleeing alone and for my own life. I never touched that beautiful young woman. Paradise Paul, I never crossed the threshold of your cabin. I was on my way back to Utah alone when you surprised me."

Paradise Paul was silent for a moment.

"Strike a match!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Hold it up to the old sinner's face, an' I'll tell ye in a second ef he's lyin'!"

Several lucifers snapped at once, and one of the gang collected them and handed the blazing bunch to Paul.

Stepping forward, he held the light close to the Mormon's face for several minutes, and looked into his eyes.

Timothy Tenwives stood the scrutiny well, although he plainly showed the fear of death that had taken possession of him, and tried to confirm his asseverations by his look.

"He's a liar from the ground up!" suddenly cried Paradise Paul. "A Mormon will swear ter anything fer life an' a wife. Noose him, Dick! We'll get another tune from the Salt Lake harp when his feet leaves ther ground!"

Timothy Tenwives started when a pair of merciless hands put the noose of a lariat over his head, and tightened it under his left ear.

"Thar 'll soon be one Saint less," continued the Deadwood giant when the loose end of the rope had been tossed over a limb, under which, strange to say, the wife-hunter had halted. "Now my dear Timothy, ere you leave yer earthly kingdom fer one whar a Mormon bez a poor show fer wives, tell the unblushin' truth. Whar's my little girl?"

"I have sworn that I do not know," was the reply. "I can do no more than that. You can hang me, but I have not lied."

"Oh, no! a man who war at Mountain Meadows would not lie," said Paul. "You have just one minute ov grace. Last summer it war tar an' feathers now it's just what we said it would be ef yer ever came back to Deadwood for a wife—death! I count three, pards. At ther third number haul away on the Mormon galoot!"

Paradise Paul stepped back, and six swarthy hands clutched the rope that encircled the Mormon's neck.

"Ready now, boys. I begin the death count, Timothy. One—two—"

Paul pronounced the second numeral as long as his breath lasted.

Not a muscle of the Mormon's face stirred.

He had evidently resolved to die game.

"Three!"

The word was spoken sharply, and in a clear voice.

The three toughs started back and gave a jerk, and the body of Timothy Tenwives shot toward the limb above.

"Game ter ther last for all. I thought he'd squeal," remarked Paradise Paul in disappointed tones. "Fasten ther rope, boys, an' let 'im swing, a warnin' to all Mormon snakes."

"No, cut him down!"

The Deadwood giant whirled at sound of these four words, and found himself face to face with Broadcloth Burt who had taken a step forward with a cocked revolver in his left hand.

"What's that, Denver?" growled Paul.

"Cut that man down, I say."

"You don't mean it?"

"I do!" and, quick as a flash the Denverite's arms went up and two revolvers instead of one looked into the faces of Paradise Paul and his crowd.

"I give you one minute," he said calmly, addressing the leader of the rough set. "Lower that swinging body, or I shall touch two triggers at once! Quick!"

The Deadwooders stared aghast at the dandy who stood erect, almost touching the swaying body of the Mormon, with his heavy revolvers jerked from they knew not where, looking them in the face.

There was "shoot" in the "fashion-plate's" eyes.

The next moment the body of Timothy Tenwives fell with a thud at Broadcloth Burt's feet.

"Ar' ye satisfied now?" asked Paradise Paul in tigerish tones.

"I am. Now, leave me with this man."

There were muttered curses and a sullen withdrawal on the part of the Deadwood toughs, and the Denverite was left where he stood, master of the situation.

"Thet trick's yers an' ye'r welcome to it!" exclaimed Paradise Paul from a spot twenty yards down the trail. "You may hev been used ter hev'in yer own way in Denver, but you can't in this kentry. You ar' nothin' but an animated fashion-plate, an' you'll get sp'iled ef you ever show yer face in Deadwood. Keep yer distance, kid-gloved galoot! Come back ter Deadwood, an' we'll transform ye into a human sieve. An' don't you forget it, Broadcloth Burt!"

The eyes of the dandy twinkled fearlessly, and he laughed as he took a step toward the unseen speaker.

"Look out for me then!" he exclaimed. "It's likely that business will call me back to Deadwood!"

"All hunk!" responded Paul. "Come back an' die!"

CHAPTER VII.

A FRIGHTENED MORMON.

"NOT another step back that way. Alice isn't in Deadwood!"

Paradise Paul was in the act of remounting his horse as he spoke.

"I b'lieve that Mormon spider went toward the limb with a lie on his lips," he went on, facing his gang. "He took the two hosses an' the girl. Who else'd take her?"

There was no response; the question seemed a conundrum to the toughs of Deadwood.

"You, pards, kin go back ef ye want ter, but I don't. What did Broadcloth Burt want Timothy Tenwives cut down afore he war dead fer? By the eternal stars! I'm the wildcat thet's goin' ter find out. No Denver daisy shall git ahead ov Paradise Paul, an' no Mormon shall live ter boast ov victory obtained in Deadwood! Yonder's Deadwood," and the speaker's hand pointed toward the north. "Up thar's monte, poker an' liquid lightnin'; hyer's danger, vengeance, an' mebbe—death! I stay."

In an instant, as it were, the Deadwood giant had changed his mind.

A moment before, full of oaths and indignation, he was for going back to Deadwood; now he was resolved to stay and find Alice, the abducted belle of Dakota.

"Wal, we settled the Mormon snake, anyhow; thar's some consolation in thet," said a voice at Paul's elbow.

"But it's blamed poor satisfaction since it didn't give me Alice," was the quick retort. "Don't I know now thet thar's a league 'twixt thet Denver dandy an' old Tenwives? Suthin' pertainin' to Alice fetched thet animated fash-

ion-plate in kids all the way from Denver. He's a cool one ef he is a dandy; but," setting his yellow teeth hard, "I'll show him that my hand holds the most trumps. Bury yer Mormon pard, Broadcloth, an' live ter find out thet when Paradise Paul war born, every wildcat left the kentry!"

The men who surrounded the maddened speaker began to remonstrate with him on the folly of remaining where he was, and hunting alone for his ward; they volunteered to remain and help him, but no.

When Paradise Paul set his head it was no use to reason with him; he never changed his mind.

So they rode away toward Deadwood, looking back often to see him sitting like a statue in his saddle, with horse and man outlined against the star-studded sky in weird silhouette.

"I war alone when I made thet famous campaign ag'in' my enemies in the Cheyenne hills," he said, speaking aloud to himself. "I am alone again, with all my pards goin' back ter Deadwood. Paradise Paul, you hev to accomplish one thing or forever leave the Black Hills, an' thet is to restore Alice to her home, an' to prove to all thet oppose ye, that a tiger came to Deadwood when you got hyar."

Slowly he turned his horse's head toward the tragic spot where we left Broadcloth Burt and the Mormon elder at the conclusion of the foregoing chapter.

"I'll go back an' see how the pards, one living, t'other dead, got along," he remarked, with a smile, and directed his steed down the trail.

It was dangerous for Paradise Paul to go back there if the Denverite had not left the spot; but what did he care?

A short distance from the scene of the lynching he slid from the saddle, and throwing the bridle-rein over a bush, crept forward on foot, with every sense on the alert, and a revolver in each hand.

His figure cast a dark shadow against the rocks and whitened tree-trunks, but he saw it not as he advanced.

A few feet from the hanging-tree the Deadwood desperado hugged the ground, while he surveyed the place and listened.

Not a living object, and not a sound! "They've pulled out, er one ov 'em bez," he muttered. "Ov course, only one war in a condition ter navigate, an' thet one war not the Mormon seraph."

After a while Paradise Paul crept, snake-like, forward.

Sure enough, the ground was deserted, but one witness of the thrilling scene which had lately transpired there still remained.

This was the lariat, which lay where it had been thrown after being taken from the Mormon's throat.

"Ye did yer duty an' no mistake," chuckled Paradise Paul, as he picked up the rope and submitted it to a brief inspection. "I'll just take ye along. Who knows but that's another neck for ye ter break afore we go back to Deadwood?"

The night was not light enough to show the Deadwooder any trail, and with the deadly coil he went back to his horse.

If he had gone down the trail a short distance he might have witnessed a sight that would have raised his revolvers.

Leaning against a huge flat rock was a man whose face was white, and who appeared almost totally exhausted.

"That's what I got for sleeping five miles out of that wolf-den called Deadwood," said this individual between gasps. "They caught me nappin' an' pulled me up to a limb with as little ceremony as a man hangs a dog. He told me that I would die with a lie on my lips, an' I did touch the fringe of the unseen border-land. Noosed by a lot of Gentile toughs—unconverted American toughs! An' saved by another—for what?"

The speaker stopped as if his own question involved a mystery which he could not fathom.

"When more than half-dead, Broadcloth Burt made the Deadwood dogs lower me. I tried to kill that man a few hours ago. I put a revolver at his head, but a defective cartridge saved him. I ought to thank him for what he did, but I don't. He came up from Denver to baffle me—to prevent me from makin' Alice my eleventh wife. He told me on the porch of Colonel Sandbank's hotel that I was a dead man if I attempted to win the girl. After all this, he saves my life. There's something here I can't explain. But let it go. I came to Deadwood for a wife—for the loveliest girl in the Black Hills, and I haven't given her up yet. Somebody stole her to-night, an' I know it wasn't Timothy Tenwives. Who did it? Ah! there comes in another mystery!"

The Mormon stopped suddenly as if a suspicious sound had fallen on his ear; and he moved down the trail by keeping the rock at his side for support.

"I'm almost defenseless now," he went on. "What if the accursed Gentiles should close in on me again? My dandy deliverer left me suddenly and helpless among those who want my blood. Give me time, put a weapon in my

hand, Fortune, an' I will yet show the Gentile dogs that when they touch Timothy Tenwives, they stir up a Mormon tiger!"

Evidently the disciple of Brigham Young had not recovered from the effects of his late terrible experience; for he trembled in every limb, not for fear, but from nervous exhaustion.

When he reached the end of the rock he stopped and listened as he held his breath.

"My God! I was right!" he ejaculated, as there fell against the surface of the rock the figure of a human being.

"Can it be that I have mistaken him?" said a voice which made the Mormon hug the shadowed rock all the closer. "Broadcloth Burt would not deceive me in a case like this. He told me that he had rescued that fiend from the rope that I might pay him for a part of my past. I pray thee, Heaven, to deliver him into my hands to-night!"

Timothy Tenwives saw the speaker while his eyes almost started from his head.

"Merciless Maud, the Mormon wife!" he murmured. "An' I ask Thee, Heaven, if Thou ever remembered Timothy Tenwives, to keep him out of the clutches of that infuriated demon!"

Not more than fifteen feet separated the pair; the Mormon elder in the shadow saw the woman in the starlight, and held his breath and almost stilled his heart while he stared at the apparition.

For a moment her piercing eyes seemed to single out the man she hated, but she passed on and left him alive and alone.

"Great Jehosaphat! I've been in pickle before, but never in brine like that," said Timothy Tenwives when he found his tongue. "That she-devil made trouble enough when she was part of my family, an' she knows how to keep her hand in wherever she is. She would have annihilated me on the spot if she had discovered me, an' that would have ended my business into Dakota. Why, I would have been a baby in her hands, but there was a time when I was master over her. May I be everlastingly hornswoggled, if I get fooled ag'in by a woman like that. I kin feel the cold chills playin' checkers on my back yet. Timothy Tenwives, thet's the second time to-night you've escaped bein' put on the calendar of saints."

Cold perspiration stood out in great drops on the Mormon's forehead.

"I've got to get away from hyar," he said. "Them Deadwood demons are liable to come back. I haven't given the girl up yet. By heavens! I never will!"

He attempted to reach the middle of the trail, and in doing so he was compelled to leave the rock.

As he took his hands away he staggered like a drunken man, tried to reach the wall again, but missed it, and, with an involuntary cry for help, fell headlong into a dark crevice!

The next moment the figure of a woman was at the place, and in her right hand was a knife that reflected the gleam of the stars.

"I missed him a while ago," she said. "That was his voice! I would know it among the voices of a thousand men. Can he have fallen into this opening? What kind of a place is it?"

The avenging woman listened for several minutes at the dark opening, but not a sound came to her ears.

Her eyes, sharp as they were, could not penetrate to the bottom and see the insensible heap of humanity that lay on the rocks, completely at her mercy if she had but ventured down.

Timothy Tenwives had fallen a distance of twenty feet, and, if not dead, was liable to give somebody a great deal of trouble.

The way of the Mormon transgressor was hard enough, but he was to see better times.

His day was yet to come.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN FROM IRON-GRIP SHOWS UP AGAIN.

THE return of Paradise Paul's toughs to Deadwood without their leader created a ripple of excitement in that celebrated town.

By this time it had become generally known that Alice had mysteriously disappeared, and all put the crime of abduction with many an oath and epithet on the Mormon's shoulders.

All?

No; there was one person who took a different view of the matter, but he did not proclaim his opinions from the house-top.

"Smash my photograph! if I believe thet Mormon toad did it all!" this individual exclaimed in audible tones to himself as he stood behind the cashier's desk of the Setemup, and gazed ever and anon at the last blurred page of the register that encumbered the greasy counter before him. "It looks as if I'm out a guest or two, but that doesn't matter much, as I've no hankerin' after such fellows as Broadcloth Burt an' the man whose name is all initials. Girl gone, eh? That's about the way I thought it would end sometime; hinted that much to Paradise last summer when they gave the Mormon the grand bounce. She's too good-lookin' to live hyar, an' not get found out away from home. Don't I see that thet Denver sport an' Timothy Tenwives have a bond of affection between 'em? If such a thing didn't exist, why

did the dandy make the Deadwood toughs lower the polygamist for? Then that's thet she-alligator who calls herself the Blushin' Daisy of the Mountain Top. She's a fragrant flower, by Jove! Don't we all know thet she's nobody but Paradise Paul's wife—the woman what left 'im sometime ago an' went down an' married a Mormon? I didn't recognize her at first, but it's as clear as mud now. If the Mormon toad didn't git Alice, then thet daisy knows whar she is."

These were the sage reflections of Colonel Sandbanks, proprietor of the "first and only" hotel in Deadwood, and he had ample time to evolve them from his massive brain as he enjoyed a villainous-looking but fragrant cigar in his reception-room.

The colonel, as we have already said, was a citizen who had seen all the ups and downs in wild border life; he had been miner, proprietor, Indian-fighter, gambler and regulator, and had drifted to Deadwood where, for want of something better to do, he had set up the "first and only," an investment which, while it was not very profitable afforded him plenty of "elegant leisure," which he valued above gold itself.

On a number of occasions the colonel had seen Alice whose beauty was of that kind which naturally excited him.

He had not passed that age when woman no longer fills the heart with delightful emotions, and his cracked mirror told him that he was still "passable."

He thought of this behind his counter the night after the return of the toughs from their hunt for the Mormon elder.

"By Heaven! I see my chance now," he suddenly exclaimed. "Paradise Paul wants thet girl. He's not particular how he gets her. What if I should rescue her? What if the band of Simon Sandbanks should rescue her and be the means of restoring her to him? Wouldn't I be in a position to demand almost any reward? This may be fate, Simon; the comin' of those people to Deadwood may be fortune playin' a full hand for you! Girl gone; Paradise Paul nearly crazy; wants h r badly; willin' to do anything to get her back. Heavens! what a chance! Guess I'll take it."

Colonel Sandbanks shut the register with a slam.

"I'm a wife-hunter, too!" he cried. "I guess I know the Black Hills kentry as well as the next one. I used to be a bad man on the trail in California, an' I've lost none o' my cunning standin' behind this counter. Thar won't be another stage in fer three days an' my gue won't come back. Thet galoot with the alpt bet name is mixed up in this plot somehow, he'll never call fer his room. I'm a durned f ef I stay hyer when thar's a wife like Alice be won. Colonel, we'll just close the shanty fer a few days."

Seizing a pen as if a brilliant idea had flashed like a gleam of sunshine through his brain, he tore a blank page from the register and wrote across it in large letters this significant announcement:

NOTICE!

THIS HOTEL IS CLOSED

DURING THE TEMPORARY

ABSENCE OF THE

PROPRIETOR,

COLONEL SIMON SANDBANKS.

Then he looked at his work like a man well pleased, and proceeded to fasten the poster to the outside of the front door.

"While thet isn't very explanatory, it'll do me," he remarked. "I'll be back hyer ready to receive the congratulations of my friends at the end of three days. Blast if I don't raze the Setemup an' build a palace that'll make the blushin' Mrs. Sandbanks holler for joy. I'm not daisy in looks; I don't sport the duds that Denverite does, but I'm equally as fit ter be a lovin' husband an' affectionate father."

Ten minutes later, to be somewhat precise the proprietor of the Setemup reappeared on the porch equipped for the adventure he had decided on.

He was fully clothed now and looked quite unlike the indolent landlord, inasmuch as he was armed with a Winchester and two revolvers, besides a formidable bowie which looked capable of doing bloody work at close quarters.

"I'm the walkin' arsenal ov the Setemup!" he ejaculated, surveying his get-up in the starlight when he had locked the door behind him.

"Armed as I am, I'm more than a match fer anything. I'd like ter tackle a grizzly just fer amusement, er git into a tussle with a harem ov mountain lionesses solely to recall old times. I'd just like ter whisper in yer ear ere I depart on my mission, Paradise Paul, thet Alice will soon be Mrs. Simon Sandbanks, ov Deadwood, you bet!"

The valiant colonel turned to leave the porch when he suddenly became conscious of the presence of some one, and he stopped with a sense of sudden and indefinable terror.

"Goin' fer ter leave the shanty, kernul?" said

the voice of the figure that blocked his path-way.

Colonel Sandbanks made no reply, but stared at the speaker, who was neither tall nor short, but a well-built man with a pair of shoulders that suggested an uncommon amount of strength.

He was apparently unarmed, although it was not likely that he was really in this situation, and there was a vein of hidden humor in his tones.

"Mebbe you'd better stay at home an' tend ter bizness," he went on, looking at the proprietor of the Setemup. "Wife-huntin' among ther Black Hills ain't the healthiest kind ov employment an individual kin get into. I thought I war my Christian duty to inform you ov dis."

Instantly the eyes of Colonel Sandbanks lit up with the spirit of '49.

"Thunder an' guns! what makes my bizness yours?" he almost roared, and a lengthy stride carried him almost to the cool interrupter.

"Who ar' you anyway, an'—"

"Don't you recognize me, kernul?" grinned the man. "Only a few hours ago I registered at this Deadwood palace, that you call the Setemup. Didn't I photograph on yer fragrant page ther legend ov 'A B. M. from I.-G.'?"

"That's a fact! You're the galoot, sure enough!" exclaimed the colonel.

"Wal, I stand by that legend, fer its just what I am—A Bad Man, from Iron-Grip!"

The coolness of the man and the manner in which he uttered the last words were tantalizing.

"You haven't come back to stay?" cried Colonel Sandbanks. "Look at that notice on the door. I've shut up the Setemup for a while."

"I would infer that from your remarks," was the reply. "No; I'm not hyer ter claim my room, but I'm back on a little private bizness. Ar' you really goin' arter thet girl?"

"Perhaps."

"I wouldn't, kernul."

"Simon Sandbanks has run his own affairs a good many years, pard."

"An' never war in love before?"

The colonel bit his lip.

"That's my bizness!" he snapped, tartly.

"Ov course. It war only an observation ov mine. I've advised yer ter stay hyer an' do the honors ov ther Setemup, but if you won't, kernul, why—go!"

The Man from Iron-Grip stepped back and looked at the proprietor of the Setemup, with arms folded upon his good breadth of chest.

"That's just what I'm goin' to do!" exclaimed the colonel. "From Iron-Grip, eh? I don't now whar the claim is, an' durn my skin, ef I'm goin' ter ask. But you nor no other man—don't keer whar he hails from—arn't goin' to irn me from a purpose formed deliberately. In a 'forty-niner, I am; went overland with the rst gang, and saw more squar' fightin' and hardships than Iron-Grip ever dreamed ov. Put thet down, my prophet ov evil. Thar stands before you to-night one ov ther hardened relics ov '49, a man ov muscle, an', when you stir him up, a wildcat with all the claws on!"

To the colonel's disgust his peroration was followed by a laugh, and the man in the starlight kept on till his eyes twinkled and his sides shook.

"I'd like ter exhibit you at Iron-Grip, scrub my back ef I wouldn't!" he exclaimed. "Thet speech would immortalize you. What 'll you take for a two months' tower through the Juniper Hills?"

A howl of rage was the colonel's answer.

"I'm no fool!" he roared. "Open yer mouth ag'in an' I'll pulverize you before I proceed on my journey. I'll make the damsels of Iron-Grip sigh for the Bad Man's return."

He stood so near the cool visitor that their toes almost touched, and the fists of the proprietor of the Setemup were clinched till they resembled knotted mauls of iron.

"Shut up!" he thundered. "Not another word, my hollyhock from the Juniper Hills! I'm a pulverizing machine ov the days ov '49. I can feed men, er crush 'em. Keep yer talk-trap sealed, er by Jehosaphat! I'll mash you!"

The Man from Iron-Grip stepped back suddenly, but not in alarm.

"Excuse me. I didn't know I had struck a quartz mill," he apologized, and then: "I'm a man masher myself, an' wherever I go I manage ter keep up the reputation of Iron-Grip," and suddenly lowering his head, he struck the proprietor of the Setemup between chest and stomach, and lifting him entirely off his feet, hurled him against a huge cactus in a wooden tub at the edge of the porch, overturning and completely crushing it.

The Man from Iron-Grip watched for a moment the ludicrous contortions of the fallen landlord, and then turned away with a light chuckle.

"Some fools will find out before they die," he said, "that I'm a dangerous Man from Iron-Grip."

He did not look behind him to note the results of Colonel Sandbanks's tumble; but walked off and directed his course toward the Full-Hand Casino.

His tussle with the colonel seemed to have given him unusual delight, for under his overhanging brows his black eyes twinkled, and he broke out into another laugh as he crossed the threshold of the place.

"I hated to spile a healthy cactus with such a man as Kernul Sandbanks," he said. "Arter this, I'll apologize ter every plant I see. When you make thet daisy girl yer wife, kernul, just notify this individual from Iron-Grip, will yer?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE COLONEL OBTAINS SATISFACTION.

COLONEL SANDBANKS picked himself up after several minutes' tussle with the needles of the cactus, and looked madly in every direction for Bowie Bluff, who, of course, did not materialize.

He swore roundly and to good advantage, as it seemed, for his profanity relieved his mind of a great load.

"Butted through a cactus!" he growled. "By Jove! notbin' but gore can wipe out this insult! I'll have the blood of that Iron-Grip coward for this. I've a notion to forego my hunt for Alice, an' set out on a crusade for his heart. The white-livered skunk! he wouldn't tackle me in a civilized manner; but made a batterin'-ram out ov himself an' knocked me almost into the interior of next week! It's more than humanity can stand. Simon Sandbanks, you must have blood for this brutality!"

The doughty proprietor of the Setemup secured the Winchester which had parted company with him in his headlong tumble, and felt able, for the moment, "to whip his weight in wildcats."

He then proceeded to relieve himself of numerous spines that had adhered to his skin, and it is safe to say that the more he picked the madder he got.

Each spine, as he removed it, increased his hatred for Bowie Bluff, and if the Man from Iron-Grip had put in an appearance during the operation, the colonel would certainly have attempted his life.

"I'll explode with rage if I stand here an' hunt my anatomy for cactus needles!" he suddenly growled. "I'll hev to inaugurate my crusade against that Iron-Grip rough, or heat up till I furnish a case of spontaneous combustion. He may have left Deadwood; but I think not. Let me meet him! I'm dyin' to cover the devil!"

As the Casino was the most prominent place of its kind in Deadwood, it was but natural that Colonel Sandbanks should first seek it for two reasons.

In the first place, he wanted to add fuel to the fire by taking a glass of the decoction sold over the bar of the Casino, and secondly he hoped to find Bowie Bluff there.

Carrying his Winchester at full cock, he marched toward the place.

The door was open, and a quick glance beyond the portal brought Sandbanks to a sudden halt, and threw his rifle almost up to his shoulder.

Fortune was favoring him.

At the bar of the Casino stood the very man he sought, and the colonel saw with delight that Bowie Bluff was just raising a glass of whisky to his lips.

"Thar goes one drink that'll never be tasted!" ejaculated Sandbanks. "I'll pay fer the glass, Mr. Iron-Grip. This is fer thet tumble through the cactus!"

A moment later the ringing report of the colonel's Winchester cut the air, and the whisky-glass, shattered into a thousand pieces by the unerring bullet, flew from the rough's bronzed hand.

"Great God!" fell from Bowie Bluff's lips as he wheeled toward the door, his fingers clutching the butt of a revolver as he executed the action. "Whar's the Deadwood skunk what did that?"

"Hyer, Mr. Iron-Grip!" came the answer, and the muzzle of the colonel's weapon was thrust inside the Casino with the deadly-flashing eyes of the enraged landlord behind it. "The shootin' tricks I learned in '49 I hev'n't forgot. Just keep yer hands down, please, er I'll shatter yer head like I shattered yer glass!"

"Bless me! ef it ain't old Sandbanks!" exclaimed more than one man as he started back from the counter or sprung up from the tables, and gazed in astonishment at the man who stood in the doorway. "The old badger's got fightin'-blood in his veins at last."

Yes, the colonel's "fighting-blood" was "up," and his eyes told plainly that he was there to have satisfaction or death.

Bowie Bluff saw the unmistakable menace of eye and rifle; he stood at the bar facing the mad proprietor of the Setemup, but with that cool expression which nothing chases from the face of the hardened desperado.

"Thet cactus tumble war no fun," came over Sandbanks's rifle. "How'd you like ter have a thousand fine needles jabbed inter yer from four sides? It may be a picnic fer ther jabber, but it's none fer ther jabbed. See hyer! Just hold up yer hands, Iron-Grip. Hands up!"

The swarthy fingers of Bowie Bluff fell back from the revolver with forced reluctance, and up went his hands.

"I've got you at my mercy," continued the colonel. "Do you know what I'm goin' to do?"

"Not exactly."

"I'll tell you. The shootin' ov thet whisky-glass from yer hand war only a little diversion ov mine. I could hev dropped yer dead in yer tracks. Now, my fragrant rose from Iron-Grip, I'm goin' ter send ye home marked for life. I should take yer life, but I've concluded only to spill a little blood this time. Keep them hands up!"

The cheek of the colonel was pressed close against the stock of his Winchester, but the shot was not delivered, for all at once the door of the Casino was shut in his face, striking the muzzle of his rifle, and hurling him back several feet.

"No man shoots my customers when I can bluff his game!" exclaimed the barkeeper who had glided down behind the counter to the wall and shut the door. "Now," to Bowie Bluff, "ye're on a par with that old 'forty-niner out thar, an' if you don't get even with him it's yer own lookout."

The inmates of the Casino heard Sandbanks's howl of rage at being thus suddenly cheated of his revenge.

"Think ter trick me, eh?" he exclaimed.

"By Jehosaphat!—I'll get even yet."

He sprung to the door and sent it flying open with a kick, then sprung across the step to be confronted with a revolver that almost touched his face.

"Throw up yer paws, if you please!" said a cool voice, and the infuriated man brought suddenly to bay looked over the leveled weapon into the face of the Bad Man from Iron-Grip. "Haden't you better postpone that markin' fer life bizness? I object ter hev'n' it performed just now."

What could Colonel Sandbanks say? He was at the mercy of the man from Iron-Grip.

"Thet's right, postpone it, kernul," continued Bowie Bluff. "An attempt to perform it might prove unhealthy just now. We'll take a little straight p'isen."

"What! drink with you?" spluttered the colonel.

"That's what I insinuated. Don't start. You shall! You ar' at my mercy, an' if you refuse, the next time you fall you mayn't light on the soft side ov a cactus. March up to thet bar an' drink to ther health ov A B. M. from I.-G."

Simon Sandbanks had sense enough to see that a refusal, or a display of stubbornness might send a pistol ball through his head from the rough's weapon, so, smothering his rage as well as he could, he walked up to the bar.

The bartender was promptly on hand.

"I'll take the worst rot-gut you've got," he said. "I feel like kickin' myself into the interior of next month. The worst p'isen you've got, pard."

The heavy glass was placed at the colonel's disposal, and from the bottle at its side he poured out a drink that was enough to fire the blood of six men.

"Hyer's ter Iron Grip, accordin' ter orders," he growled, as he turned to Bowie Bluff. "One ov these times, my perfumed dandelion, the toast 'll be on the other side."

A single gulp took the liquor down, and then with an "I guess I'll go," he turned and hurried from the Casino, to the amazement of every one present.

Bowie Bluff seemed the most nonplused of all.

"I wasn't done with the old sinner yet," he said. "I war goin' to tell him ag'in that he'd better give up his wife-hunt. One girl-hunter came to grief to-night, an' another—"

The sentence was broken by the unmistakable crack of a Winchester in the hands of some one without, and with a wild shout which filled the interior of the Casino, Bowie Bluff reeled from the counter and spun across the floor.

It was the mad shot of a mad man, and if fired with deliberate aim, the Man from Iron-Grip was already a corpse.

"I guess thet sets us squar'!" hissed the man who lowered a smoking rifle from his shoulder, as Bowie Bluff struck the floor. "It's not ez painful ez fallin' through a cactus, fer a death-bullet never hurts. Now fer Alice. I learned ter shoot in '49, an' I hev'n't forgot my cunnin'."

Colonel Sandbanks never went to the Casino to ascertain to a certainty the effects of his shot; he seemed to take it for granted that it had put a sudden and terrible termination to Bowie Bluff's career, and he felt that he was at liberty to begin the hunt for Alice which he had inaugurated only a short time before.

Nobody seemed to follow him, just as if such scenes were common in Deadwood, as indeed they were in those lawless days, and he was not molested.

He went to the stables of his hotel, and saddled a horse as well known in the Black Hills country as the owner himself, and led the animal into the starlight.

"Colonel Sandbanks, have you seen Paradise Paul lately?" asked a silvery voice, at the sound of which the landlord of the Setemup whirled as if it had been a serpent's hiss.

He looked at the speaker for a moment, then the bridle-rein dropped from his hand, and he

almost lifted himself from the ground with an exclamation of amazement.

"Alice! by Jehosaphat! In the name of Heaven, fair creature, whar did you come from?"

"No explanations now, colonel. I am very anxious to see my friend."

"Paradise Paul, eh?"

"Yes."

"Wal, he ain't in Deadwood just now."

"What! Is he hunting for me? I have come back without his help; but I've had adventures, colonel."

"Did the Mormon let you go before they hung him?"

"He never had me in his possession!"

"What!"

"Timothy Tenwives never touched me. I have been the captive of the most relentless tigress that ever lived—Merciless Maud, the Mormon Exile."

"Je-hosaphat!" cried the colonel.

CHAPTER X.

THE LOST HAND.

If Alice had been taken from Deadwood by the revengeful Mormon wife, if she had succeeded in eluding her captor, it was likely that the end was not yet.

Would not Merciless Maud, baffled in her first attempt, return with twofold fury to the game?

"An' so that she-alligator, an' not the old Mormon, took you away?" said the colonel shortly after the exclamation with which we closed the preceding chapter. "Paradise Paul an' his pards hung the wrong man, in one sense of the word, but Timothy Tenwives didn't get more than he deserved, eh, girl?"

"I cannot say," was the answer. "They have told me that it was for me that the Mormon left Salt Lake City. Paradise Paul has frequently warned me against him, but I know not what to think."

"Wal, we're all rid of the Mormon Greaser forever. That hangin' released ten wives from slavery. He will never get you, Alice—never make you Mrs. Tenwives number eleven. Thar ar' others whose lives are devoted to you; ahem! others, my dear child, whose affection is as everlastin' as the endurable hills!" and Simon Sandbanks put on an affectionate look and sought the depths of the girl's eyes.

"Confound it!" he said to himself at the same time, "she's come back just when I didn't want her to. I can't have a chance to rescue her from the clutches of some one, an' thus prove my devotion. It'll be a damned dull courtship now, I'm thinkin', with the odds somewhat ag'in' me, but I guess I'll be able to pull through it an' to drag the Deadwood blossom along."

It was rather provoking, that just as the colonel was ready to leave Deadwood in search of Alice, she should return.

The unexpected and unwished for had happened.

No chance to show his devotion now unless the Mormon tigress should return to claim her prey, and just then the proprietor of the Setem-up did not think of this.

Alice did not stop to detail her adventures while in Merciless Maud's hands; she was anxious to find Paradise Paul.

Colonel Sandbanks told her that her guardian had remained from Deadwood ever since the departure of the toughs in search of Timothy Tenwives, and closed by offering her an asylum beneath the roof of his hotel.

"Thank you, but I have a home," said Alice gently, but with a certain firmness. "I will go thither and wait for my friend. He will not be gone long. My trail, if he strikes it, and I am sure he will, will lead him back to Deadwood."

"I'll just take my hoss back into the stable. I was goin' ter hunt you up, girl—goin' ter shed my blood for ye, if necessary; but yer comin' home bez deprived me of that pleasure. Back goes my hoss to the stable; but I want you to know, girl, that in Simon Sandbanks you hev a friend who'll stick to ye through thick an' thin."

The girl turned away, and the sorely disappointed citizen of Deadwood led his horse dejectedly to his stall.

"Suthin' hed ter turn up, curse it!" he growled. "Fate had ter throw her back into Deadwood afore I had a chance ter get in my work. Yet I informed her what I war willin' ter do. I guess I overdrew the blood-sheddin' bizness a little, but she never noticed it. By Jove! she's a pink of perfection. She's mine from this minute—mine, despite forty Merciless Mauds an' Paradise Pauls!"

Alice soon found herself back in the old cabin once more. The light which she had left behind when Merciless Maud swooped eagle-like upon her, and succeeded in her scheme, had either been extinguished by some one, or had burned out; but she soon found another, and again lit up the interior of the place.

She now began to wait for Paradise Paul, who had remained among the hills for the purpose of finding her.

The night was far advanced, and she felt con-

fident that her guardian would put in an appearance before the break of day. She had much to tell him, all about her abduction by the Mormon wife, and more too. She had discovered how intensely Merciless Maud hated Paradise Paul, and now she knew that the pair had once been man and wife.

From the avenger's lips during her captivity Alice had been forced to listen to a story of wrong and suffering which almost froze her blood.

If all that Maud told was true, she had cause to hate Paradise Paul, and even Alice had felt her heart beat with indignation while the wronged woman spoke.

Yet she had trusted Paradise Paul so long! Could it be that he was the man Maud had painted him? Was it true that he had driven his wife from his cabin when the hills were crowned with peaks of freezing snow, and when the fastnesses of the crags swarmed with wolves?

"He drove me from him despite my prayers!—he—your friend—Paradise Paul!" Merciless Maud had hissed into Alice's ears while her burning fingers encircled her white wrist. "He did this. I would have perished if succor had not been near. I was saved—saved to be dragged to Utah to become the wife—the slave—of a veritable human devil. I have lived through it all for vengeance against two men!"

Alice tried to release herself from that burning hand, but she could not; but she was forced to listen to the whole terrible narrative, forced to hear Merciless Maud's scathing denunciations, and to gaze into the depths of eyes that seemed living coals.

When the hour for escape came, how eagerly the girl embraced it!

When the Mormon Exile left her for a moment to go down the trail, in answer to a signal which led her to a crevice, into whose darkness we have seen Timothy Tenwives take a headlong tumble, Alice made a dash for liberty.

And fortune had favored her!

Back again in the Deadwood cabin, she could picture to herself the astonishment that must have filled Maud's heart on her return to the spot where she had left her captive secure, and there, too, Alice could recall the thrilling story told on the trail, and wonder if the Mormon would ever complete her revenge.

Recollecting that the cabin door stood slightly ajar when Merciless Maud made her successful swoop, Alice shut it and secured it with some stout boards provided for the purpose.

No fears of the Mormon tigress now.

Colonel Sandbanks had not acquainted Alice with his late adventures in the heart of Deadwood, the meeting with Bowie Bluff, his tumble into the cañon and his revenge when he sent the Man from Iron-Grip reeling across the floor of the Casino with, as the Colonel fondly thought, a bullet in his brain.

Of these events Alice of course knew nothing, for her sudden return to Deadwood had taken the colonel by surprise, and almost deprived him of the use of his tongue.

More than once Alice went to the door and listened for the sound of a footstep she could pick from among a thousand.

To the right of the door was a little window the glass of which had almost cost their weight in gold, and as the night was warm Alice had not closed it.

"He's here at last!" she suddenly ejaculated during one of her trips to the door. "Don't I know the tread of his horse as well as his own step?"

Her sharp ears had caught the hoof-beats that approached the cabin, and instinctively she laid her hands on the barricade of the door.

Paradise Paul was coming back from the hunt for her; she would now know whether Merciless Maud had told a truthful story.

Alice stood at the little window and held her breath; she trembled with eagerness.

In another minute she would not be alone.

As the last plank fell from her eager hands the horse whose gallops she had heard drew up before the cabin, and the next moment she threw wide the door and sprang to the threshold to greet the rider.

"Thank Heaven! at last!" fell from her lips in joyful tones.

In the saddle before her sat the figure of a powerful man, and there was from his lips an instant response to the girl's ejaculation.

"What! back safe, Alice?"

"Safe!" she made reply.

"That's more than I can say," said Paradise Paul, as he slid from the saddle and broke for the door. "Girl! Alice! I come back a winged eagle; I am Paradise Paul no longer, but a devil from this hour!"

Alice had already drawn back and he tumbled into the cabin with the last word sounding like the hiss of a serpent.

"You kin stand what I'm goin' ter show you," he continued, wheeling upon her. "I've taught you, Alice, ter be more than a faint-heart at the sight of blood. See hyar!"

The girl sprang toward the table at which the leader of the Deadwood toughs had halted.

"Say I'm not winged fer life, will ye?" he went on as he tore from his left arm some

bloody bandages which had once formed a part of his dark shirt. "Say that thar isn't one person in the world that hates Paradise Paul, ef ye dare, Alice! Look at that!"

His arm fell on the table as the last word was spoken, and Alice with one look started back with a cry!

"Merciful heavens! you have been robbed of a hand!" she gasped in accents of horror.

Paradise Paul gritted his teeth till they cracked.

"I should remark ter mention!" he said, looking Alice in the face. "Two hours ago, one of ther best hands west of the Mississipp' war on that arm. Whar is it now? I cut it off!"

"You? My God—no!" exclaimed the girl.

"I cut it off," repeated Paradise Paul, glancing at the bloody stump which lay on the table. "In the first place, it was shattered at the wrist by a bullet, an' I finished the work with my bowie."

Alice shuddered.

"It is a wonder you haven't bled to death," she said.

"I kept back my life-tide by binding it above the wrist with the threads of a lariat—the same cord what choked that Mormon serpent. But fer that, I wouldn't be hyer now, Alice. Look at that hand, girl." And Paradise Paul held his right hand up to the girl's gaze in the light. "That's the one on which so much depends the rest of my career. It shall settle with all I hate; it shall pay the debt I owe for the loss of the other! Why don't you ask me who sent the infernal bullet crashin' through my wrist?"

"The sight of it has appalled me," was Alice's reply. "Tell me who maimed you for life that I may hate him. Woe to him if he comes to Deadwood to complete his work!"

Paradise Paul broke into a strange laugh, while his eyes twinkled ferociously.

"You want to pay him back, do you, Alice?" he said. "That's no man's work—but a woman's. You saw the passenger that came in from Rockerville in the last stage up? Wal, she's the wildcat who sent the bullet home."

"Merciless Maud!" exclaimed Alice, recoiling.

"That's her name. She said, arter she shot, that it war a reminder of the past. I used ter know that woman. Mebbe I used to think suthin' of her; but to-day she's the wife of the Mormon galoot we caught an' strung up on the Denver trail since sundown."

"I know it all," said Alice, looking into Paradise Paul's eyes.

"Who told you?"

"Merciless Maud herself."

"When?"

"To-night. I have been her captive instead of the Mormon's."

Paradise Paul shrunk from the table with a wild cry.

"Then who do you believe—me or that tigress?"

He came toward the girl, looking like a demon incarnate in the weird gleam of the cabin light.

"Choose between me and that Mormon avenger!" he cried. "She has filled you with some terrible story. She has told you that she was once my wife—that I drove her from this cabin an' made her listen to a Mormon elder's courtship. Do you believe her, Alice?"

Alice stood before him, calm, and gave him look for look.

"There must be some truth in her story," she said. "Nobody with a heart would invent such a narrative, but—"

The clinched fist of the Deadwooder shot upward and a mad oath parted his lips.

Alice saw the coming blow but could not avoid it.

"Believe her lies an' take the consequences!" he hissed. "With only one hand left, I am still able to punish."

In another second the Deadwooder's ward would have reeled senseless from his iron fist, but a human figure bounded like a lion into the cabin, and landed between Paradise Paul and his victim.

"I'll take a hand in your game, Paradise," he said coolly as he shoved the Deadwooder toward the wall. "That girl shall form her own opinions and be protected in them. I didn't come to Deadwood for a muss, but I'm always willin' to accommodate any man who is dyin' for one."

The tall and handsome figure of the interloper stood between Alice and her guardian with his face turned toward the latter, whose eyeballs glared at him like the orbs of the tiger.

"Wal, you did come back to Deadwood, Broadcloth Burt!" he growled. "Leave it within ten minutes, er jine the sleepers on the bill!"

The Denverite only laughed.

CHAPTER XI.

THE THIRTY DEADWOOD TIGERS.

PARADISE PAUL slunk to the wall before he stopped. The sudden interference seemed to amaze the tough, and he stared at Broadcloth Burt until his eyes seemed on the eve of flying from his head.

"I seldom mix in other people's quarrels," said the Denverite, "but this is one of the times

when a man can't keep his hands out. Touch that girl with your one hand, Paradise Paul, and you'll hear from me!"

He said no more, but moved to the door with his eyes fixedly regarding the baffled Deadwooder, who appeared ready to spring at him with the ferocity of a tiger.

His last glance ere he crossed the threshold of the cabin was a quick one toward Alice, who rewarded him with a look full of silent thankfulness, and the following minute the elegant dandy was gone.

"That's his style, is it?" blurted Paradise Paul, whipping out a revolver as he leaped toward the door. "Winged though I am, I'm still a match for that fashion-plate. I told him on the trail that for him to come back to Deadwood, was to die, an' I'll prove my words in less than thirty minutes."

"Let him go," cried the girl. "Your arm demands—"

"Stay back!" thundered the Deadwood tough. "You believe the Mormon tigress, not me."

"Oh, yes; come along, Paradise Paul," said a voice which came from the mouth of a man who could not be far away. "Ef I'm ter die to-night, I want to know it. Fool with me an' you'll find me the deadliest fashion-plate you ever tackled. I'm goin' to the Setemup, whar I have a room, an' thar you'll find Broadcloth Burt, from Denver."

Paradise Paul paused and listened to these words, which proclaimed the nerve of the man by whom they were uttered.

"You heard what he said, girl?" he said to Alice, as he turned back into the cabin. "We'll find him at the Setemup when we want him, an' thet'll be before daylight."

Growling out the last words, Paradise Paul began to examine his arm in the lamp-light.

The girl looked on from a few feet away, and when the Deadwooder looked up suddenly from the inspection that made him grit his teeth the eyes of the pair met.

"It's beginning ter growl, thet stump is," he said. "It cries fer vengeance just ez ef it had a tongue! Don't forget that the woman you b'lieve instead ov me winged me for life, Alice. Just think fer a moment what I've done for you an' how grateful—"

He paused abruptly, and with the girl, turned suddenly toward the door.

"Hello! Paradise! Back ag'in ar' ye?" exclaimed the rough-shirted fellow whose burly figure almost filled the doorway. "I'm durned ef the galoot didn't walk off arter all."

"Who?" cried Paul.

"The man Colonel Sandbanks shot."

"He didn't shoot anybody?"

"Yes he did. The old pigeon got his dander up, an' tumbled the galoot half-way 'cross the Casino."

"Tumbled who?"

"The cool 'un from Iron-Grip. Arter lyin' on the planks awhile, he picked himself up an' remarkin' thet he'd see Deadwood later, walked off ez cool ez a fightin'-cock."

"Couldn't Kernul Sandbanks shoot no better than thet?"

"If he kin, he didn't. It war a time, Paradise, but—Heavens! what's that?"

Paradise Paul had held up the handless stump, and the tough had cleared the space between them at a single bound and was staring at it unable to articulate a word.

"Did I tackle Broadcloth Burt? No; not on the trail at least. Oh, I'm winged fer the rest ov my days, Jack. Whar ar' the boys?"

"Whar I kin find 'em in five minutes."

"Bring 'em hyar!"

"Fer work, Paradise?"

"Fer bloody work! Bring the boys hyar without any fuss. Thar shall be bloody fun in Deadwood to-night, er to-morrow it'll be a howl-in' wilderness!"

These words made Alice start, but the speaker did not observe her.

When left alone with her a moment later, Paradise Paul said with triumph blazing in his eyes:

"Don't you make a fool ov yerself now. We've got that Denver Apollo just whar we want him, an' if Kernul Sandbanks war brave enough ter shoot one man to-night he's got too much sense to try ter protect a guest like Broadcloth Burt. Stay whar you ar'. Because he interfered awhile ago, don't you follow suit."

There was no reply: the words seemed to have sealed the young girl's lips, and the giant whose shadow fell against the cabin wall fell to examining his wrist again.

In less than five minutes the tread of a number of men was heard, and the next minute the cabin was filled by the toughs of Deadwood.

"Thet arm sha'n't be dressed till we've tended to the handbox fool who's come back ter Deadwood just ez ef he wants ter pass in his chips," said Paradise Paul as he faced the band with up-lifted arm. "Broadcloth Burt has come back, an' tells me that we'll find him when wanted at the Setemup. You know what he did on the trail whar we pulled the Mormon up? I told him thet it war death fer him to come back to Deadwood, an' back he is in the teeth ov it!"

A volley of oaths was fired off by the desperadoes who listened to the Deadwood giant.

"We ar' goin' ter prove it—right away!" Paradise Paul grated. "I thought he had some sense, but he doesn't exhibit a bit. Boys, I'm sorry to say thet I'm suspicious ov thet child thar."

"Ov Alice?"

"Yes. Don't ask me why now," and the speaker turned from Alice to the crowd. "Ar' ye ready ter tackle an' crush the Denver handbox?"

"Try us, Paradise! Kernul Sandbanks may shoot one man, but he daren't defend another."

"That's a fact, pards!"

"Let's go an' try the old coon."

Paradise Paul was not, under such circumstances, the man to exhaust the patience of the men of whom he was the acknowledged leader.

"You will keep company with Alice till we come back," he said to a good-looking man, who had been regarding the silent girl fixedly for some moments. "Under the circumstances, I don't like to leave her alone. She's been stolen once to-night, an' thar's no tellin' what might happen ag'in. Stay with her, Colorado Clate, an' amuse the child while we're gone."

Alice entered no objection; but her eyes seemed to flash, and as the last desperado left the cabin, Colorado Clate stepped toward the table and leaned against it with his arms folded upon his chest.

The tread of the Deadwood roughs died away almost immediately, and Alice was alone with the watch left behind—for what?

She knew that she was to be kept from warning Broadcloth Burt of the midnight march of the dark-shirted desperadoes; but was he not able to take care of himself?

She felt that the advance was not to be a bold one which the Denverite could squarely meet; but a silent, secret affair, like the noiseless creep of the jaguar upon his sleeping victim.

In all probability the Set-em-up was to be surrounded, and Broadcloth Burt called to the door, and riddled with bullets.

"They'll trap the Denver daisy, girl," suddenly said Colorado Clate, breaking rudely in upon the train of the fair creature's thoughts. "What a fool some men ar' when they ought ter show some sense! In ten minutes we'll hear their revolvers."

In ten minutes!

The cool announcement seemed to send a thrill through every fiber of Alice's frame.

She almost started forward.

Never before had she seen the man from Denver to stand face to face with him.

He had saved her from a cruel blow; he had come back to Deadwood at the peril of life, and against the express commands of Paradise Paul.

And thirty men armed with bowies and revolvers were gliding through the dim starlight upon him. They were to keep the oath-framed word of their leader, that Broadcloth Burt was to die for his daring.

As she thought, her blood tingled through her veins. In ten minutes, her watch had said.

All at once she cleared the space between her and the table; she fixed her eyes on Colorado Clate.

"Don't stop me!" she cried as the rough made a movement toward the door. "Thirty men shall not find me unprepared. I am Paradise Paul's ward, but what of that? The man they want hasn't spilled a drop of blood in Deadwood."

"But you must stay hyar, Alice; them's the orders."

"Orders!" and the girl laughed. "Paradise Paul always told me to do what I wanted to do. I want to warn the man from Denver!"

"Thet'll never do! You're ter stay with me, girl. No leavin' the shanty now."

Colorado Clate's hand reached out for the giant's ward, but he stopped suddenly, for a revolver had been thrust into his face.

"Throw up your hands," ordered Alice sternly, looking into the desperado's eyes over the leveled revolver. "Up with 'em and stand where you are, or I'll send a bullet through your head!"

The man did not hesitate; up went his bronzed hands, and while he ground his teeth Alice slipped to the door.

"Follow me and I'll kill you!" was her warning, and then like a specter she vanished in the night.

"I can outrun the creepers; I will creep their lines if necessary!" she ejaculated. "They shall not surprise the man from Denver; they—"

Alice stopped as if struck by an arrow.

Twenty revolvers seemed to be emptying their contents into a certain spot.

The battle had begun!

CHAPTER XII.

A GIRL OF GRIT.

"HEAVENS! they have taken the Denverite by surprise! they are riddling him with bullets!"

These were the girl's exclamations while she listened, spellbound, for a minute to the furious fusillade.

There seemed to be no shots in reply as if the

person aimed at was at the mercy of the Deadwood mob, and unable to protect himself.

Alice instinctively drew and cocked her six-shooter while she listened.

"I must see what those human tigers are doing," she suddenly exclaimed, and away she bounded, again toward the spot where the one-sided battle raged.

"For Heaven's sake, gentlemen, what do you mean?" she heard the voice of a man say in pleading accents when the revolver shooting suddenly grew quiet. "This is my property you ar' usin' for a target. This is the first an' only hotel in Deadwood—"

"Then why didn't you give us some satisfaction when we came for yer dandy guest?" exclaimed one of the toughs.

"Didn't I intimate in polite language that he wasn't on the premises?"

"We wasn't hankerin' arter intimations; we wanted facts. Yer perlitte lingo hez cost the Setemup a new door. If the Denver Bandbox is in yer shanty, he's a sneakin' coward fer not showin' himself!"

Alice who heard every word breathed freer and uttered an ejaculation of thankfulness. The man from the south was safe!

Failing to get satisfaction concerning his whereabouts from Colonel Sandbanks, the mob had retreated to a certain spot, from whence they proceeded to riddle the door with bullets, much to the dismay of the proprietor who was forced to seek concealment in an upper room.

If Alice had gone nearer to the exasperated toughs, she would have seen that one was supporting Paradise Paul, on whose system the loss of his hand was beginning to tell.

"Not only a coward but a liar!" cried the leader of the roughs. "Didn't he tell me in my own cabin that we would find him hyer? Denver can show up more liars to the square mile than any town in the northwest, an' I know it. Let's make Kernul Sandbanks reveal the dandy's hidin'-place. Whar thar's a will thar's a way, especially when thar's a lasso handy."

With a shout of rudeness the crowd surged toward the man who stood in the starlight on the porch.

"I protest, gentlemen—"

"Protest, thunder!" cried half a dozen Deadwooders. "Ef you've made thet Denverite yer pard, kernul, you'd better shut up yer ranch. We want no monkeyin' hyer. Show up, er leave the town!"

The dark faces and glaring eyes of the mad-dened men were directly beneath the pale-faced proprietor of the Setemup, who, being on the porch, was somewhat elevated above them.

"If you'd listen ter reason—"

"We want the Denverite! hang yer reason!" The foremost ruffians were at the porch.

Colonel Sandbanks retreated a step.

"Choke it out o' the old forty-niner!" flashed Paradise Paul. "A lasso seldom tells a lie!"

That was enough; the ruffians sprung upon the porch, and the doughty colonel who a short time before had hunted and found the desperado from Iron-Grip made a dash for the open door.

His retreat was so sudden and ludicrous, that it raised a laugh, and several roughs sprung after the flying landlord.

A sudden shout announced that he had been overhauled, and a minute later the colonel was dragged from the building, amid the shouts of his captors.

"I suppose that nothing can arrest the madness of those men, but I'm going to try it," said Alice. "They will hang Colonel Sandbanks who has probably told them the truth."

By this time some one had thrown the noose of a lasso over the landlord's head, and menaced by at least twenty revolvers, he was being adjured to tell "the truth" on pain of instant death.

The situation was extremely critical.

"That man shall have a chance for his life!" cried the girl. "If they have refused to listen to him, they shall hear me!"

She sprung forward with the last determined sentence on her lips, and all at once appeared at the colonel's side.

"Great heavens! Paradise Paul's girl!" fell from the ruffian's lips.

"What! Alice here?"

"Yes, I am here!" and the beautiful creature turned toward the man who had just spoken.

"Did Colorado let you off?" he demanded with the rage of a wild beast in his eyes.

"No! I left of my own accord. He would have died if he attempted to detain me."

For a moment the captain of the ruffians was too mad to reply.

"Go back to the shanty!" he suddenly thundered. "The man we ar' goin' ter deal with is not the one you want ter save. Back to the cabin, Alice!"

But the fearless girl never moved, but faced Paradise Paul and his crowd with undaunted mien and eyes and possessed no fear.

She saw that her rough guardian was not able to enforce his commands himself; he was still supported by the pard who had been at his side all along, and his orbs burned with an unwonted brilliancy.

"Let Colonel Sandbanks off first," Alice said. "Why would he lie under the circumstances?" "Because he's mad; the Denver dandy his pard."

"Prove it."

"We warn't ten minutes behind Broadcloth Burt; he's been tracked to the Setemup, an' by Heaven! girl, he's thar yet."

"Then," with a smile, "why don't you go there and find him? Are you afraid to search a house which contains but one man as you say? Dare you go there, and give the colonel a chance to prove his words? No! you will throw a rope over his head, and, like a pack of cowards, pull him up because you say he has lied to you. I thought you were men, but I find you are a pack of ruffians."

The dark-faced ruffians seemed to recoil from the girl's withering utterances.

"Yes, go and search the Setemup, if you darel!" she went on. "This man has not lied. He came here when Deadwood didn't contain a single house, and has never left it. In all that time you have never caught him in a lie."

"Thet's a hard, cold fact," ejaculated the colonel himself. "I never thought you'd have ter say that fer me in Deadwood, girl."

"I'd say it for any one if it was the truth," was the quick answer. "Yonder's the man who should go to the cabin," and the outstretched hand covered Paradise Paul, who hung senseless on the arm of his supporter. "Take him back to it and let this man go."

"Not till we've made the old codger confess."

"To what?"

"Ter his league with Broadcloth Burt. Don't you know that he nearly killed a man at the Casino to-night?"

"Nearly killed him?" echoed the colonel with a start. "Didn't I entirely finish the tiger from Iron-Grip?"

"Not quite, kernul. Ther bloody pard walked off, an' is ready fer another tussle."

"Je-hosaphat! The next time we meet thar'll be thunder ter pay!"

"The next time?" laughed one-half the crowd. "We've not let you off yet."

"But you are going to," said Alice firmly.

"Mebbe not, girl. We'll take Paradise home by an' by. Now, kernul, fer the solid truth: whar is the Denver sport?"

"What have I told you already? I don't know. I shall not speak again. If you want him, find him!"

The colonel's lips closed resolutely behind the last word.

"Thet means they're pards! What d'ye say now, girl?"

"It proves nothing against him."

"But enough for us. Tighten the lariat a little, just to show the old liar whar's comin'. We'll hang you first, kernul, an' s'arch the Setemup next."

At that moment the lariat that encircled the landlord's neck did tighten, and he was jerked forward so suddenly that Alice was instantly left standing alone.

"You shall not!" she exclaimed. "Cowards of Deadwood, you shall not commit this crime. Drop that rope or I will send some of you to eternity before your time!"

The Deadwooders beheld her confronting them with leveled revolver and a steady arm.

"Another step either way with Colonel Sandbanks and I will shoot!" she continued. "I will vouch for his words. Broadcloth Burt makes common cause with no man. If he were in the hotel he would speak for himself."

The mob stood amazed and nonplused before the daring girl.

Only ten feet separated them, and they seemed to see the balls that filled the steel chambers of Alice's revolver.

"Take yer pard!" suddenly exclaimed a ruffian, and the lariat flung madly forward fell at the feet of the girl. "We'll give him a chance ter prove his words; but we ar' not afeared ov yer six-shooter."

The faintest smile of mingled contempt and derision played with the girl's finely-chiseled lips.

She knew that her action and the menacing revolver, not a willingness on the mob's part to release the colonel, had won the victory.

"Foller me to the Setemup an' search the ranch!" said Sandbanks.

"Now? We guess not when Denver Daisy's had time ter sneak out an' git away. Oh, no; we ar' hard specimens ov humanity, but we're not durned fools. Hedn't you better put up a notice, thet, owin' to circumstances which you could not control, you hev concluded ter shut up the ranch an' leave Deadwood? This climate might suddenly git onhealthy. Thar's goin' ter be either a pistol picnic or a hangin' epidemic hyer afore long, an' ye ar' liable ter ketch ther throat-disease."

Behind his sealed lips, the landlord of the Setemup ground his teeth.

"It's a burnin' shame!" he said to himself. "Shall I give up my ranch an' quit Deadwood for a lot ov human wolves like these? If I go I shan't go alone. What has happened to-night convinces me that Alice thinks something of Simon Sandbanks. She's saved my life an' thar's only one way to pay her back."

"Will you post the notice, kernul?" suddenly asked one of the mob, breaking in upon certain thoughts that were just beginning to assume a pleasing character.

"Give me time to decide."

"We will—till mornin'!"

"That'll do."

The discomfited crowd drew off, and Alice and Colonel Sandbanks found themselves alone.

The girl had noticed that Paradise Paul had been taken off prior to the withdrawal of the beaten mob, and she could imagine the scene taking place at the cabin.

"Girl—Alice, I owe you life itself!" cried the colonel turning upon the girl.

"Never mind that," she said, pushing gently aside the hands he extended. "I would have done for almost any man what I did for you to-night."

"You would?" exclaimed Colonel Sandbanks, his eyes dilating with astonishment.

"I came hither to warn Broadcloth Burt," continued the girl, with exasperating frankness.

"That wall ornament that got me into trouble to-night?"

"The man from Denver?"

"Yes, the fashion plate. I know him. What is that man to you, Alice?"

"Nothing, perhaps; but the men of Deadwood were going to lynch him—for what?"

"I'll be hanged if I know. And failin' ter find him they were goin' ter elevate Simon Sandbanks."

"That was apparent when I came on the scene," said Alice, with a smile.

"And they would have done it if you hadn't trumped their hand with the best display of grit ever seen in Deadwood! Say, Alice, you don't tie ter Broadcloth Burt, do you?"

"No! I—"

"By Jehosaphat! that removes a weight from my heart! I'm goin' ter git out of this infernal town, not that I'm afraid of the mountain spawn thet's just left, for I fear no man on earth, girl; but I've been thnkin' for a long time of pullin' up stakes. I've got a pile laid by fer a day when it'll come handy. I could be a money king in any city of the slope, an', with a young wife of about your age, Alice, Simon Sandbanks would pass the remainder of his days in bloomin' clover, an' respected peace."

Paradise Paul's ward heard the landlord through with a twinkle in her pretty eyes.

"I wish you success, colonek," she said.

"You'll find that young wife in Frisco, I've no doubt of it, and I hope she'll prove worthy of you."

The colonel was staggered by the cunning girl's reply.

"Confound it, Alice, you don't seem to understand me!" he cried. "I mean to say that I could live well in Frisco with the future Mrs. Sandbanks, not that I expect to find her thar, for I don't."

"Then you have her in your mind's eye, colonek?"

"I should say I hev. Alice, whar's the use of stayin' hyar under a cabin roof, when I can transplant you in a golden garden on the Pacific coast? You have rescued me from the lariat of a lot of demons. I owe you something. Accept my hand—my undying love—my—"

"There!" interrupted the clear voice of the ruffian's ward. "If I have led you to this point, forgive me. I expect I shall always remain Alice of Deadwood. Those men want you to make-up your mind before morning. Don't decide hastily. Good-night, colonek!" and the girl was gone.

The proprietor of the Setemup looked like a man dazed by a sudden catastrophe, and some moments elapsed before he collected his senses.

"I feel as if I've been stepped on by an elephant!" he suddenly said. "I've been dragged to a precipice by that girl's eyes, an' then pitched over by her hands! She doesn't take well to me; but faint heart never won fair lady. I guess that quotation's about right. Always goin' ter remain Alice ov Deadwood? I'll see about thet. I've made up my mind already, roughs ov the monte tables. Thet girl's decision settled it for me. I stay where she is if every rope in Deadwood is twisted fer my neck! You'll always find Simon Sandbanks at the Setemup ef you didn't find the Denverite thar to-night. I hate you, Broadcloth Burt! I'd like ter hand you over to the Deadwood tigers. Mebbe I'll hev thet pleasure before long!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SPOILING A PISTOL GAME.

SEATED at the one table that stood in one corner of his shanty was Paradise Paul one hour after his sudden return to Deadwood with one hand missing.

The last ruffian had taken his departure from the place, and at his command he had been left alone, as if he wanted to confront Alice by himself upon her return.

The wounded member bandaged by his pards rested on the table, and he ground his yellow teeth whenever his dark eyes fell flashingly

upon the bloody cloths, reminders of the terrible fact that he was maimed for life.

"I wish I could forget that she did it!" he grated. "I never did like ter quarrel with one ov ther softer sex; but I'm in fer it now. After I sot ye adrift ye went straight ter Mormondom an' became the eighth wife of Timothy Tenwises, the infernal old adder I've just helped ter bang! It always looked to me like a put up job, an' it war. I put you out ov my cabin because I thought you warn't squar', an' now you come back fer vengeance an' send a bullet crashin' through my wrist. Merciless Maud, I'll make you wish thet you didn't fire yer bullet through my head! Thet stump will heal. I'll be out to-morrow, an' the hand you've spared will handle the revolver ter kill. Woman, though once my wife, I'm a tiger to you from this hour! Keep yer distance. Come back to Deadwood an' die, or stay away an' let me hunt you down. Take yer choice."

He ceased, and moved quickly to the door that stood slightly ajar.

"No Alice yet," he said, in disappointed tones. "She made a fool ov herself to-night. Couldn't I see that she came to the Setemup to help that Denver sport? That preference ov hers adds another enemy to my list. I'd give a thousand if thet stump war healed at this minute. I don't ask fer a new hand. As it is, I will hate thet woman more, an' I kin kill fast enough with the hand she foolishly left me. By Jove! thar she is at last!"

This exclamation was called forth by the figure that came in sight sudden enough to make the ruffian start.

"I'll pertend ter hev cooled down, just ter find out what she's after," he muttered. "It won't do fer me ter do what I did awhile ago, not that I'm afraid ov the Denverite comin' back, but I've got ter play policy till my stump heals a little."

He drew back quickly from the door and resumed his seat on the three-legged stool at the table.

The following minute, although he did not turn his head, he was conscious that some person was at the door.

If it was Alice, why did she not enter?

Paradise Paul waited with much impatience and rage illy smothered.

It was a contest for him.

"I'll settle it one way or the other!" flashed through his mind. "I'm master yet, and when she crosses me she treads on a tiger's claws."

He turned his head and fixed his eyes on the door ajar.

"Come in, girl," he said. "I'm no steel-trap."

The door opened a foot wider, and ther—Paradise Paul sprung erect with a startling cry!

"Oh, it is you, is it, tigress ov Mormondom?" he exclaimed. "Do you think you've come hyer ter finish yer work?"

A moment's silence followed the question that was hissed forth by the maddened ruffian.

The woman at the door was not Alice; her gleaming eyes and bloodless hands, her dress and belted revolvers proclaimed her identity, and named her—Merciless Maud!

"Call me what you please," she said coolly, fixing her eyes on the Deadwood tough. "I am here for the work that best suits my purpose. If I am a tigress from Mormondom, you ought to know who gave me a right to thet title."

"I do know. You bestowed it on yourself. But, see here," and Paradise Paul held up the handless arm. "You have maimed me for life, but fool that you ar' you left me the best hand a man has—the right one!"

There was triumph in the ruffian's tones.

"My revenge is by degrees," was the answer.

"An' this wound is the first step, eh?"

"Perhaps."

"If you are satisfied I shall be. The girl broke from you, I hear? I thought Timothy Tenwises abducted her an' we hanged him for thet an' other crimes—hanged yer second husband! what do you think ov thet?"

"Then you saved me a job," the woman said.

"Yes, Alice did escape me, but the next time I will not fail."

The Deadwood ruffian shot her a fierce look, and the next moment a pair of arms encircled Maud's waist and she was lifted from her feet.

"I've crept the she-panther, cap'n!" cried the stalwart rough, who bore Maud into the cabin, despite her struggles. "I thought she'd hear me, but she never heard a step, an' I've got her foul. Isn't she a beauty, Paradise? What do you say? Shn't it be a hand fer a hand?"

The arms of the Deadwooder held Merciless Maud's hands harmless at her side, and she could only send mad looks over her shoulder into a pair of eyes that fairly snapped with victory.

It was a fact that she was at the mercy of the two ruffians.

"A hand for a hand! How does that strike you, Blushin' Daisy ov the Mountain Top?" ejaculated Paradise Paul, as he approached the captive, who had ceased to struggle and now eyed him calmly. "You took one hand to-night, an' now I hev the same chance. Hold her here,

Colorado. I hev'n't looked inter her eyes for many a long day, but I've not forgotten how she used ter look."

He stood erect, proudly mad before the woman encircled by the brawny arms of Colorado Clate, who by this capture had redeemed himself for letting Alice escape.

The eyes of the pair flashed fire as they regarded one another.

"You didn't gain much beauty in Utah," said Paradise Paul, suddenly, in tantalizing tones.

"No; but I learned to hate there."

"By Jove! I b'lieve it!" and the ruffian's eyes fell to his red bandages. "Yer work to-night proves yer words."

"It was a terrible school, an' I proved an apt scholar," Merciless Maud continued.

"No doubt ov thet. Colorado, kin ye hold her?"

The eyes of the pard were answer enough.

"Then hold her hand ag'in' the wall yonder!" said Paul, pointing to a certain spot on the rough wall of the hut. "I'm goin' ter make it a hand fer a hand; but I'll pay you back with interest, Maud. I'll take the right one!"

Ready to do the merciless bidding of his chief, Colorado Clate forced his captive across the room and seizing her right hand, forced it against the wall, and turned upon Paradise Paul with a devilish grin.

"Thar's a hand thet made yer blood run, Paradise," he said. "Now strike it whar ye please. I'll hold the target, cap'n; you do the shootin'."

"Won't I do thet?" exclaimed the captain of the toughs as up went his heavy revolver and covered the hand held against the wall.

"Now Maud, thar'll be two broken wrists in Deadwood to-night. I don't want yer life; it's only a hand fer a hand!"

The woman held by by Colorado Clate never quailed.

"You'd better make it my head, demon," she said.

"I don't want ter spoil thet."

"You will leave me a hand that may strike and kill!"

"I'll take the risk. A crippled snake seldom crawls far."

Merciless Maud made no reply.

"Hold the target steady, Colorado!" said Paradise glancing at his swarthy pard. "When the revolver cracks, throw the Mormon viper outside an' shut the door. Now, woman, you shall feel a man's revenge!"

His eye fell to a level with the revolver and he was drawing a bead on the target held against the wall.

"I'll take a hand in that game myself, Deadwood pards!" suddenly said a cool voice at the door. "Drop that revolver and let that woman go! Decide in a second, for I'm hyer on business!"

Of course Paradise Paul wheeled upon the speaker at his first word.

The man leaned coolly against the door frame.

"I know him, cap'n!" exclaimed Colorado Clate. "He's the fellow the kernul winged. The man from Iron-Grip!"

CHAPTER XIV.

COLORADO'S HUNT.

"THAT'S just who I am," said the man at the door in response to Colorado Clate's exclamation. "Alphabetically speakin' I'm A. B. M. from L. G. Ar' ye goin' ter drop that woman's hand?"

The two ruffians looked at each other for a moment and then stared in turn at Bowie Bluff.

He held a formidable revolver in each hand, and the cool eyes that glittered like burnished steel proclaimed him the desperado that he really was.

Colorado Clate was one of those who had witnessed the encounter between Bowie Bluff and Colonel Sandbanks in the Full-Hand Casino, and this is why he recognized the man from Iron-Grip the moment he caught sight of him in the doorway.

A dirty handkerchief dyed in blood encircled Bowie Bluff's head, and mutely but expressively told the story of the colonel's snap-shot; it also lent him a look which did not of right belong to him at other times.

Paradise Paul's revolver dropped suddenly but despite the menace of the two pistols Colorado Clate seemed disposed to hang on to the woman's hand.

"Come hyer, Maud," said Bowie Bluff. "By the eternal! if you ar' detained, thar'll be suthin' drop."

Merciless Maud took a step forward as Bowie Bluff's eyes fell on Colorado Clate.

With a sullen growl the Deadwooder dropped the hand and stepped aside.

"Thet's sensible," remarked the man from Iron-Grip. "Now, look hyer, ye two Deadwood nosegays. It happened thet I got hyer just in time to be ov service ter thet woman. I turn up at divers times an' places whar I'm neither wanted nor expected, an' I generally walk off with the platter. Good-night, my twin galoots. When yer stump beels, Paradise Paul, I expect ter hear ov a bar on the rampage."

"More than one bar! twenty Black Hills

grizzlies!" greeted the captain of the toughs.

"Thet's right. Take that woman off. She knows me an' we'll ter ugly understand one another. Ef you hadn't come when you did, Iron-Grip, she'd be in my fix by this time."

Merciless Maud who had halted at the door showed her teeth in a mad smile as she looked straight into the speaker's face.

"I'll give you another chance," she said.

"I'll take it," shot Paradise Paul. "I want but one!"

Half a minute later the two ruffians were the sole occupants of the cabin, and for a moment neither spoke.

"Thet's the man the colonel shot, is it?" suddenly asked Paradise Paul.

"Thet's the villain, but old Sandbanks will never draw on him again."

"Why not?"

"I'm not goin' ter let him."

"You?"

"Colorado Clate, by heavens! Twice to-night hev I been balked—once by thet girl ov yours, an' now by a dog from Iron-Grip. He's in league with Merciless Maud."

"No doubt ov that. She's willin' to take up with anybody now. First a Mormon elder, now a shooter from Iron-Grip. I'm devilish glad I got rid ov her long ago."

"You ar'? Look at thet arm."

Paradise Paul threw a quick glance at his bandaged arm, and ground his teeth till they were heard to crack.

"A thousand lives like hers could not pay fer thet left hand ov mine!" he hissed. "I shall make her know this before she dies! Glad I got rid ov her when I did! I wish I had killed her then."

"Which means thet you're goin' to do it now."

"I am."

"You handle the woman an' I'll take care ov the man from Iron-Grip. I'll track him across the continent but what I catch him. If Sandbanks, the old fool, had kept his nerves steady when he drew on that chicken, we wouldn't hev been interrupted to-night."

"An' mebbe Maud wouldn't hev come back to Deadwood. She came for me, I think."

"Or for Alice."

Paradise Paul started forward with an exclamation of horror.

"The girl! I forgot her till now. She escaped from thet woman's clutches, a few hours ago, an' Maud is not the person to give up the chase. Yes, Alice brought her back to Deadwood. She is here to strike me by robbing me ov the daisy girl ov Dakota. Alice is somewhar in Deadwood, ignorant of Maud's return. A tigress like Maud would not hesitate to kill the girl to get even with me. Colorado, Alice must not fall into her hands! She must be warned an' saved in time. I'm weak from loss of blood, but what ov thet? Merciless Maud must be baffled, an' I will baffle her!"

"I'll be blamed ef you could baffle a baby to-night, cap'n! I saw yer hand tremble while ye war kiverin' her hand. Hang me, ef I ain't kinder ov the opinion thet Bowie Bluff's comin' hyer saved my gripper. Stay whar ye ar'. Go back ter yer blanket an' rest; you'll need yer strength before long. I'll find Alice, if she's in Deadwood."

"When, Colorado?"

"Right away."

"An' you'll fetch her hyer?"

"Thet's what I'll do, cap'n."

"Good! I'll stay behind. Ef you meet Maud remember thet she belongs to me; but that citizen ov Iron-Grip—you may shatter his brainpan to yer heart's content."

"Trust me for that, cap'n. Stay down on yer blanket. When I come back I'll hev the girl fer ye."

Colorado Clate left the Deadwood cabin, and looked over his shoulder in time to see Paradise Paul stagger toward the poor couch in one corner.

"Winged fer life, cap'n," he muttered. "The night you brought thet woman to Deadwood an' told us thet you had the dandiest wife in the diggin's, I told the boys thar war fire in her eye."

"Mebbe you don't think you did wrong ter drive her away without hearin' her side ov the story, but I do. It's comin' home ter yer, Paradise Paul, an' you kin look at thet bloody arm an' think ov the time you would hev defended thet woman's name ag'in' a thousand revolvers. Yes, I'll help you through because we're pards. Ef Alice is in Deadwood to-night I'll find her, but I'm afraid thet woman called Merciless Maud bez set up a cold deck on me."

Colorado Clate was bent on two things.

In the first place he wanted to find Alice, and secondly, he was anxious to get the drop on the man from Iron-Grip.

Perhaps he was most anxious to carry out the second design, for whenever he thought of the work of the desperado he felt his blood grow hot in his veins.

"By Jehu! I'm willin' to meet him any way. Ef I can't steal a march on the Iron-Grip galoot, I'll face him and his six-shooters. He had me foul to-night; but fer that he would never have got away. You an' me fer it, Bowie Bluff, if

you ar' still in Deadwood. To tell the cold truth, I'd sooner find you than Alice."

It was natural for Colorado Clate to suppose that Alice was afraid to return to the cabin, and into the presence of the ruffian who inhabited it.

He knew that once before on that very night Broadcloth Burt's interference had protected her from Paradise Paul's rage, and having gone to the Denverite's assistance in return for his help, would she not shrink from the hated shanty?

"Ef Maud hezn't got her work in, she's still in Deadwood," mused Colorado. "When I saw her last she war talkin' to Colonel Sandbanks on the spot whar she kept us from chokin' him. He'd keep her from the shanty, ov course he would."

And Colorado turned his face toward the Setemup as if he had suddenly reached a conclusion concerning Alice's whereabouts.

When he reached the famous Deadwood hotel it was silent, dark and apparently deserted.

Considerable time had elapsed since Alice's spirited rescue of the landlord from the lariat of the Deadwood tough, and Colorado could readily imagine that the colonel had either retired to rest, or had fled the "city," fearing further indignities at the hands of the unpacified men.

He approached the hostelry almost noiselessly and listened like a spy on the porch.

The door of the "reception-room" was shut, and not a sign of light rewarded his gaze.

"The Setemup skunks a graveyard fer silence," said Colorado, after listening awhile and growing impatient. "Looks to me as ef the old 'forty-niner bez pulled up stakes an' mosied off."

He laid his dark hand on the latch, and softly tried the door; but it did not yield.

"Locked up, sure enough! We'll turn yer old ranch inter a daisy monte parlor, colonel. We'll dedicate it to-morrow night, an' then fer the highest old time Deadwood's hed fer six months!"

The closed door seemed to tell Colorado Clate that the Setemup was no longer a hotel under its owner's management, and that Colonel Sandbanks had fled to parts unknown.

If this was the case then no information regarding Alice would be obtained at the hotel and the desperado turned away.

"Thar comes the stage ov the competin' line!" he exclaimed as he reached the edge of the porch, and heard the rumble of a heavy vehicle, and the clear voice of a stalwart overland driver as he sung out lively to the horses always glad to reach Deadwood which was the end of the route.

"Thet line always comes bu'stin' inter town after midnight, an' thet's just why it'll never grow inter popularity. Ef thar's any guests fer this ranch, they'll wake the colonel."

The Denver stage of the opposition line came thundering down the dusty street with the sombreroed Jehu on the box, cracking his whip, and singing out to the horses at the top of his lungs in a mixture of Spanish and American lingo but half intelligible.

Colorado waited for him on the porch.

"Whoa! Dead-wood!" yelled the driver, throwing himself back as the spirited horses fell back on their haunches. "Hyers thet kernul's shanty solemn ez a grave, an' twice ez still! Hello! thar, my gentle hash-producer! I've got a passenger thet I picked up on the trail. He looks like a saint astray from the Mormon fold."

Down sprung the driver and bounded to the rear door of the stage just as two men were stepping out.

"I'll help the find out," he said. "Hezn't he waked up yet?"

"Only once, but he's as mule as an oyster. We had a notion to toss the Mormon serpent out."

By this time the driver had pulled from the interior of the vehicle the body of a man, and with it in his strong arms, was approaching the motionless figure on the porch.

"Hyers a case fer yer doctors, colonel," he yelled. "Hol spirit ov the Setemup! Wake up thar! Hyers the stage from Denver!"

The driver reached the porch as his brazen lungs vociferated the last sentence, and the next moment he had deposited his burden at Colorado Clate's very feet.

"I'll bu'st the blamed door in!" and he leaped across the porch, and struck the door a tremendous blow with his bare fist.

"I'll look at the corpse!" murmured Colorado, still unperceived by all. "What kind ov a 'find' is it anyhow?"

He stooped over the human figure lying in the starlight and scanned the face for a minute.

"Great Jehu! it's thet Mormon galoot—Timothy Tenwives!" pealed suddenly from his throat, and bounding over the body he almost fell against the horses.

"What's that, pard?" demanded the driver whirling instantly upon the excited tough.

"Whisper thet ag'in, will yer?"

"Yes, I know that man. We hung him a while ago. Whar did you find 'im?"

"'Bout six miles out ov Deadwood, lyin' across the trail."

"Wal, you've fetched him to the wrong place. We'll chaw him up hyar!"

Did Colorado Clate see the eyes of the burly driver flash?

"I guess not," he said coolly. "I ginerally stand by my passengers. That man thar war one. I protect him!"

"Look at him!" cried Colorado, stepping forward and pointing at the body on the porch. "He's a bloody Mormon—a man only fit to be pulled up an' kept thar two hull days. Thar's thirty men in Deadwood what want his blood. Ez I hev remarked, you've fetched him to the wrong place. Do you like a Mormon skunk?"

"No, sir; I hate 'em!" was the quick response, and the stage-man stepped toward Timothy Tenwives. "Thirty ag'in' one?"

"Thet's ther way it stands hyar now?"

The next instant the driver swooped down upon his unconscious passenger like an eagle, and lifted him from the porch; then, with two quick strides, he thrust him back into the stage.

"Thar he is—in Big Jehu's castle!" he hissed, wheeling upon Colorado Clate. "Now, my Deadwood daisy, bring on yer thirty lynch-ers!"

CHAPTER XV. "UTAH OR BU'ST."

IN such an unexpected manner had the Mormon elder come back to Deadwood!

If he had been consulted it is not at all probable that he would have returned at all, but having been found lying across the Denver trail at the mouth of the fissure or pit into which we have seen him tumble headlong, he had no voice in the matter, and was carried back to the place where his life was not safe for a minute.

Such is the fortune of life.

If Big Jehu, the stage-driver, had been so disposed, he could have told Colorado Clate how near his foremost horses came to treading on the man lying helpless on the trail; how, just in the nick of time, he jerked the steeds back and rescued the Mormon from beneath their very hoofs.

But Colorado did not inquire, and Big Jehu was not communicative.

The eyes of the driver flashed fire, as erect, like a giant, he stood at the rear end of his vehicle and dared Colorado to bring on his lynch-ers.

He had deposited the body of his passenger on the inside of the stage, and shut the door on it.

Colorado Clate was somewhat taken aback by the sudden action and the dare.

He had not expected it from the rough driver.

"Wal," he said, "ef thet's a dare, we'll trot out ther daisiest gang ov hangin' cherubs you ever laid yer eyes on."

"All right; trot 'em out!"

Big Jehu walked around the vehicle and to the front wheel.

"I see thet the two kids I brought along hev gone somewhar ter liquor up," he continued. "I'll take the hosses to the stables. My passengers kin stir the kernul up when they come back, an' ef nothin' happens I'll come back, too."

"Mebby you'd better keep a-goin' ef ye'r goin' ter make thet Mormon yer pard," growled Colorado under his breath, as he watched the stage move slowly away. "I'm skunked ef thet isn't a combination totally unlooked fer at this stage ov ther game. I thought thet Mormon postle died with a broken neck when we had 'im in charge, although Broadcloth Burt did make us drop the carkiss; but hyer he turns up right in Deadwood with breath still in his body. Thet man, Big Jehu, must hev made his will. Nobody but a fool would attempt ter make a Mormon his pard in such a hawk's nest ez Deadwood."

With a glance at the Setemup, still as silent as the tomb, Colorado Clate turned on his heel and walked away.

"I haven't found the girl, but I hev diskivered a new source ov a rumpus. Let Alice go fer a spell. Thet Mormon is a dangerous man. When he wakes up and finds himself in Deadwood, with nobody twixt him and a lariat but Big Jehu, he'll wish himself in the bosom ov his harem. Ef I kin rouse the boys, we'll git to ther stables in time fer the wakin' up."

Meanwhile, Big Jehu had reached the rickety low-roofed sheds dignified by the collective name of "the stables," and quickly unloosed and stalled his horses.

It was the end of the stage-route of the time, but there was no accommodation for the stage, which had to stand out in all kinds of weather.

"We're hyer in Deadwood," said Big Jehu, as he ran his long arms into the stage and grasped his passenger. "They've already diskivered you, an' from what that big galoot said, they don't like you, my gentle nosegay from Salt Lake."

He drew the Mormon out and looked down into his face in the light of the stars.

"Thet's right; look into my face an' wonder whar ye ar'," he said, noticing that consciousness was again asserting her power. "My old pard, ye'r in Deadwood."

A low cry burst from the Mormon's throat.

What! back again among the tigers who thirsted for his blood?

His last recollection was a horrid one, of falling into a dark pit, and the terrible thud that checked him he felt still, even in Big Jehu's arms.

"I'm goin' ter shoot out the solid truth," said the driver. "I've seen a sample ov the men who want you, an' I dared 'em ter play their game out."

The Mormon, entirely conscious now, started and shuddered perceptibly.

"Thar's no bones broken in yer anatomy, eh, Timothy?"

"Not a bone."

"Thet's encouragin'. You don't want ter tackle the Deadwooders alone, pard?"

"No; but let the cowards attempt to noose me again! I am a Mormon an' the Gentiles hate me; but, by the Saints! when men cross me, I'm a tiger."

The last words were hissed forth, and with an effort the Mormon disengaged himself from the driver's grasp.

"Try ter stand, Timothy," laughed Big Jehu, stepping back. "Ef you've the use ov yer limbs you may stand a show ef the Deadwood toughs don't double-team on yer. Ha! ha! thar you go! totterin' like a baby!" And the hands of the stage-driver darted forward to catch the falling Mormon.

But his arms were an inch too short, for Timothy Tenwives eluded them and fell in a heap on the ground.

With the smile still on his lips, Big Jehu stooped over the prostrate man and was about to lift him, when a quick step fell on his ear and a hand touched his shoulder.

"Great Caesar!" he cried, leaping up.

"Don't let me scare you," was the answer

"Have you any message for me?"

"Who are you?"

"Broadcloth Burt."

The driver eyed the tall and elegantly-dressed sport from head to foot.

"I've got one letter," he said.

"Let me have it."

Big Jehu ran his hand underneath his coat and produced a small, carefully-sealed envelope which was eagerly accepted by the Denverite.

"Thanks, Jehu. Isn't that man Timothy Tenwives?"

"Thet's my name," said the Mormon elder.

"What fetched you back hyer?"

"You'd better say who. Ask that whip-slinger."

The Denverite looked at Big Jehu.

"Did you do it?" he asked.

"Yes, I found 'im more dead than alive on the trail."

"Before Heaven! I had no voice in the matter!" asserted the wife-hunter solemnly. "If I had been consulted, I think I would have voted unanimously to remain out ov Deadwood, for the present, at least."

"And forever, if you take my advice," said Broadcloth Burt, fixing his eyes full of meaning on the Mormon. "I repeat here what I told you on the porch of Colonel Sandbanks's hotel: you're a dead man if you attempt to play your original game. Remember that!"

"Let me git back to the bosom of my family and I'll swear ter remain there forever," said Timothy Tenwives.

"Then; Big Jehu will start south with you to-morrow."

"Thet is if they let him alone till then," said the driver with a grin.

"Have they discovered you since your return, Timothy?"

"That man informs me that they have."

"Then, if you want to see your numerous family you haven't got a minute to spare. Daylight must see you far toward Utah. You've played a foolish game. You gave out a little publicly among the brethren an' others, not altogether saints, that you war going to invade Dakota an' bring back the daisiest wife a Mormon ever won. It was your open boast everywhere except among the nine Mrs. Tenwives left behind. A man is often brave save in his own house."

The Mormon's eyes dilated.

"Who told you that I made my boasts about gettin' a new wife?" he asked.

A smile appeared under the dandy's sleek mustache.

"Let it be sufficient to say that I know, Timothy," he said. "I must say that I admire your judgment. She is a flower and no mistake, but you must go home satisfied that the Deadwood pansy will never bloom in a Utah garden."

"I staked a good deal for her, though."

"Like a fool! and came within an ace of losin' yer life," blurted Big Jehu for an approving look from Broadcloth Burt.

"Some men are born fools!" said the Denverite. "Go back to your family, Timothy. Wife-huntin' fer a Mormon is durned shabby employment in this pistol-kingdom. Men like Paradise Paul don't take kindly to your doctrines."

"I could kill that man!" hissed the Mormon in the voice of an adder.

"No doubt of it, an' thar's a woman not a thousand miles away who could kill you both."

"I know that," and Timothy Tenwives recoiled several inches as he spoke. "I was almost within reach of her hand to-night."

"And I told her about whar I left you."

"You did?"

"Yes; shortly after I left you after yer hangin' by the Deadwood toughs, I met Merciless Maud in the mountains. She swore that she would not take your life if she found you—at least not now, and I told her where you war. But she didn't find you it seems."

The Mormon was silent for a moment.

"I escaped her by falling accidentally into a pit," he said. "When I afterward crawled out of it I fainted on the trail, and Jehu thar found me. I am in a bad fix ain't I?—hunted by a female tigress and wanted by Paradise Paul and his Deadwood vultures!"

"I should gently observe that you ar' in a pickle, Timothy. Salt Lake City's the only safe place for you. Go thar and live; stay hyer and die. Take yer choice, but don't choose like a fool."

"I'll go back. By the bones of the Latter Day Saints! I'll shake the dust of this place from my feet forever!"

The Mormon seemed in earnest; he looked frightened and penitent.

"Help him out of Deadwood if you can," whispered Broadcloth Burt at the stage-driver's ear. "I don't want the thirty tigers to tear him up. You go back to-morrow. Hide him somewhar till then."

"I'll do it!" was the response. "It riles me ter see thirty ag'in' one, even if thet one is a Mormon snake whose head I'd like ter crush."

Broadcloth Burt turned away with an admonishing glance at Timothy Tenwives.

"Will we meet any more, Broadcloth Burt?" asked the Mormon.

"Thet depends," was answered back over the Denverite's shoulder. "Go home. Shall I repeat my warning of the porch?"

"It's not necessary," and the Mormon saw the Denverite disappear.

"Come! I'm goin' ter take you out ov this, pard," said Big Jehu, as his heavy hand dropped on the Mormon's shoulder. "You have promised ter go back ter yer affectionate family. Ter stay hyer is to die, an' you know it, too."

The Mormon did not stir, but the hand of Big Jehu shook him up.

"Did I really promise that Denverite to go back?" he asked.

"Sartinly you did an' thar's whar ye'r goin'! This way, please, my Mormon seraph."

Before he could remonstrate Timothy Tenwives found himself hustled along with force and but little ceremony.

"It's Utah er bu'st, Timothy," said the driver, "an' ef ye stay hyer, it 'll not be Utah!"

The next moment and almost before Big Jehu had finished his sentence the clear report of a Winchester rung out on the night air, and the figure of the Mormon Apostle reeled from his companion's grasp.

"I guess that Mormon snake will stay hyar!" said a loud voice.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MOTHER'S MESSAGE.

QUICK as a flash the big driver of the Denver stage whirled upon the man who had delivered the sudden shot.

"Show yerself!" he grated. "Walk out like a man an' face Jehu ef ye dare!"

There was no response.

"I know ye," continued the driver. "You ar' the man I met on the porch ov the Setemup when I carried the Mormon from the stage. They call you Colorado Clate hyer. This Mormon war nuthin' ter me, but it's infernal cowardly ter shoot a man thet way. Come out an' face me, if you dare."

Big Jehu was rewarded with no reply to his challenge, and after awhile he went to where Timothy Tenwives lay and picked him up.

"I guess it'll not be Utah, my Salt Lake nosegay," he said looking down into the white face revealed by the stars. "Ef you war a Gentile how I would make Colorado pay for thet shot. But ez it is, ye'r not worth avengin' anyhow, though while my blood war hot, I would hev made the Deadwooder show his colors."

He carried the Mormon from the field of disaster and passed down the Denver trail with his burden.

"Broadcloth Burt told me ter take the Mormon out ov town, an' I'm goin' ter do it ef he is a corpse. I kinder like thet dandy Denverite ef he is a walkin' bandbox. Thar's grit in his heart, an' if he ever wants help an' will draw on Jehu, he'll git it."

Nobody seemed to follow the stage-driver and his ghastly burden, and two miles from town he began to examine the Mormon for the bullet wound.

"Blamed ef he war hit at all!" he suddenly exclaimed looking up in astonishment as if some one stood over him waiting for his report.

"The mean skunk's ball only winded the Mormon spider. Not hyer's blood under his hair. The bullet tore along his skull."

Such was the discovery of the bronzed surgeon who examined his patient in the shimmering light of the stars that fell on the Denver trail.

"Mebbe he'll be able to resume his journey if I can bring him to," he went on, and then he fell to work to restore the Mormon to consciousness.

In this he soon succeeded, and thirty minutes later Timothy Tenwives, bruised and sore from his tumble into the pit after the apparition of his revengeful wife, found himself several miles from Deadwood, the only occupant of the trail so far as he knew.

"Ye'r safe byer till I come along on the stage," were Big Jehu's parting words. "Then I'll whirl you southward whar ye'll stay if you exhibit any sense, an' leave wife-huntin' up byer alone."

And the Mormon had promised faithfully to remain where the driver had left him, and there he was among protecting rocks and secretive bushes that seemed to form an impenetrable lair.

"I'd like to know who sent Broadcloth Burt the letter Jehu fetched from Denver," he said in audible tones. "He came up here to circumvent me, I know, an' he was sent by some one. I did boast in Salt Lake, but only to the Saints, I thought, that I was coming north for a new wife. Somebody betrayed me; some one told an enemy that I had my eyes on the belle of Deadwood, an' I had no more than reached the town ere Broadcloth Burt puts in an appearance. I have promised to go to Salt Lake—home. I have sworn to remain here till Jehu comes along to-morrow. It will be leaving the girl behind, an' if I turn my back on her now, I lose her forever."

He clinched his hands as he paused.

"What haven't I risked for her already?" he asked himself. "I've felt the halter around my neck. I have faced two mobs, Merciless Maud, an' been shot. I am hundreds of miles from my family, an' all for that Dakota rose. Merciless Maud got ahead of me when she abducted the girl, for if she had not succeeded I would have secured the prize. I will yet! They don't know me who think I will go on to Salt Lake without the eleventh Mrs. Tenwives. Gods! but I feel sore over my tumble into the pit, but that mad woman is enough to frighten any one."

What! are you going to break all your promises, your oaths, Timothy Tenwives?

Are you determined to remain behind in the death land you have sought and perish in a vain effort to add to your infamous woman-pen in Salt Lake City?

If you are a fool, then remain and take the impending consequences.

Weak and exhausted, the Mormon fell asleep among the bushes, and the night wore on.

If he could have gone back to Deadwood he would have seen Broadcloth Burt break the seal of the letter the stage-driver had placed in his hands, and if he had looked over the giant's shoulders, he might have read the following message:

"BROADCLOTH BURT:—

"For the sake of Heaven! do not fail. My child is my life. Restore her to my arms before I die. I, who have suffered so long without her. I cannot think of being mistaken. She must be my child! They lie who tell her that I am dead. Fail me not, my friend. Bring me the child for whom I constantly yearn, and Heaven will reward you; I cannot. I wait for her. I pray for your success."

"THE PATIENT ONE."

This was the message that came to Broadcloth Burt from Denver.

"I will succeed!" fell from the dandy-sport's lips, as he folded the paper and put it away.

"Neither Mormon, Paradise Paul, nor that female demon shall defeat me. Wait on a short time longer, Norah. I will bring the long-lost child to your arms, or in Deadwood I will leave my corpse!"

It was the determination of a brave man, the resolution of a border hero.

While he read the letter by match-light behind the stage stables, he was watched by a man whose eyes fairly glistened, and when the light went out, and the burnt match fell at the dandy's feet, the watcher moved a step nearer as if he did not want to lose sight of his man.

"Some men ar' born fools an' you ar' one ov 'em," he hissed. "You'd better go back ter Denver. Deadwood is a death-trap for you. I know that you want the girl. That's what brought you byer, an' nothin' else. Look byer, Broadcloth Burt. I saved Merciless Maud awhile ago just when Paradise Paul war about ter shoot her from Colorado's grip. I leaned inside her cabin an' kivered the two larkies just in the nick ov time. I calculate thet they'd give their dust for a glimpse ov this infant. Don't I know who sent thet letter? That's a sick woman in Denver. You came up byer from her bedside my dandy sport. Merciless Maud knows it all. Whar's the girl now. Gone off with Colonel Sandbanks, eh? If you want her why don't you foller thet pair? But mebbe you don't know it, an' I'm not goin' ter illuminate yer mind."

The man who had been creeping after Broadcloth Burt stopped suddenly, for the Denverite was in the shadow of the Setemup Hotel.

"Oh, the hotel's empty—the colonel's gone," he laughed. "Ye'r likely ter run into a hornets' nest if you go much further. In this fight fer vengeance, an' a pretty girl—"

"Halt! Hands up!" rung out from the shade of the house, and the man from Iron-Grip, who was the man at the Denverite's heels, saw him stop and lay his hand on a revolver ready to leap from his belt.

"They've got him!" he said, stopping as suddenly as Broadcloth Burt had halted. "I don't mix in this affair, fer it's not my funeral," and turning suddenly on his heel, he glided away, leaving the man from the South to his fate.

Broadcloth Burt saw the outlines of the four men whose Winchesters covered his breast.

For once in his life at least he had been taken unawares, and was at the mercy of men who had no respect for life.

"Shall it be hands up er toes up, Broadcloth? Take yer choice!" came over the Winchesters in the sternest of tones. "A man ov yer experience knows thet we don't play arrest. Decide!"

The silence that followed the command was ominous.

Broadcloth's eyes flashed; he bit his lip under his waxed mustache, and his hand fell from the butt of his revolver.

"You have the drop on me," he said.

"I should whisper," was the response. "Come forward with yer hands above yer head. Move one toward yer six-shooter an' you die in Deadwood."

Menaced as he was, the Denverite could do but one thing and live, and he did it, for up went his hands, with the palms turned toward the quartette, whose swarthy fingers touched the deadliest triggers in the Northwest.

"Here I am," he said coolly, looking into the faces of his enemies as he reached their midst.

"The cap'n wants you," was the answer.

"Paradise Paul?"

"Yes."

"All right. Take me to his shanty."

"Not right away. We'll get a drink, an' the rest ov the boys, first."

An eager light appeared in the depths of the Denverite's eyes.

"We'll let you set 'em up at the Casino; then we'll face the cap'n. Will you treat?"

"Certainly," said the sport with a smile. "I'm here in Deadwood for a short time only, and that's nothing small about me. To the Casino, then."

The four men and their handsome prisoner who was closely guarded moved from the shadow of the Setemup, and advanced toward the Full-Hand Casino.

Not a movement of the Denverite escaped the watchful eyes of the quartette.

They knew the man with whom they had to deal.

Once before that night they had hunted him, but instead of finding the man they wanted, they had found Colonel Sandbanks whom Alice had rescued from the lariat.

But now they had the Denver sport—the man who had come to Deadwood for a purpose, and that purpose, as they veritably believed, was to abduct Alice the wild town's belle and Paradise Paul's ward.

They would march him first to the Casino where the rest of the thirty pards were likely to be found, and, after a treat, they could conduct him to their one-handed captain who would rid the world of Broadcloth Burt.

This was the programme.

With steady step and head erect as if he were victor and not a captive the Denver sport marched to doom.

The Casino was an all-night resort for the human bats of Deadwood; it never closed its doors, and the gambler and rough always found a smile and a welcome awaiting him beyond its threshold.

The five men reached the front of the saloon a few minutes after the Denverite's sudden arrest.

"Hyar we ar'!" and a bronzed hand fell on the latch. "Walk in first and surprise the boys, Denver."

The door flew open with the last command, and the tall figure of Broadcloth Burt appeared in the doorway.

"Great God!" ejaculated a dozen men who caught sight of him at the same moment and sprung up. "That's the man we missed! That is Broadcloth Burt!"

Amid the clicking of revolver locks as the deadly weapons leaped from the desperadoes' sheaths, the Denver sport stood firm and even smiled.

"I'm hyer but not alone, gentlemen," he said. "Behold my escort!" and he moved a hand toward the toughs who had entered behind him.

"I'm not byer of my own accord," he went on, "but thet makes no difference. Gentlemen of Deadwood, walk up and nominate yer liquids."

The occupants of the Casino could not move for amazement; they stood still and stared at the coolest man they had ever seen.

"He means it, pards!" suddenly exclaimed one of the sport's captors. "We ar' goin' ter the cap'n's shanty after the treat. It's a squar'

game. We got ther drop on Broadcloth awhile ago; thet's all."

Thus assured, the Deadwooders crowded to the bar toward which Broadcloth Burt advanced and leaned an elbow nonchalantly upon it.

What made his eyes glitter so?

Did he know that nobody stood between him and the door?

All at once his hands disappeared beneath his elegant coat, and while twenty whisky glasses were about to touch as many pairs of lips, two revolvers looked suddenly into the faces of the hilarious crowd.

"I guess I'll run the machino for awhile," he said, stepping back a foot. "Down your poison first, rattlers, and then, hands up!"

CHAPTER XVII.

DENVER VERSUS DEADWOOD.

It is needless to say that the glasses were drained in silence.

The imperturbable coolness of the dandy from Denver was enough to intimidate even the hardened wretches of Deadwood.

As the heavy glasses dropped empty on the counter, the Deadwooders glanced at the man who had not moved an inch and who looked at them between the cocked revolvers.

"Gentlemen of Deadwood," he said, "I may be one of the men you've read about. If I hold the best hand just now don't be discouraged. It may be your turn to-morrow. The business that brought me to Deadwood was not the invasion of your rights."

"What war it, then?"

This question was shot out venomously from a point behind Broadcloth Burt.

"My God! ther cap'n!" ejaculated several of the villains who looked at the new-comer.

There he stood, just inside the Casino's door, a bloody sleeve lying in a sling that touched his chest, and a revolver in his one good hand.

It was Paradise Paul sure enough!

Of course the man from Denver shot a quick glance at the questioner.

"What brought you ter Deadwood? Out with it now, er ferever hold yer peace behind dead lips!" came over the leveled weapon.

Broadcloth Burt turned in a manner that brought him face to face with the crowd that had recoiled from the bar, as well as with the captain of the thirty pards.

He had the thirty on his right, and their desperate leader between him and the door at his left.

"Dare ye spit it out?" continued Paradise Paul, in tones that were a challenge. "If ye didn't come up from Denver ter kill, in the name ov Heaven why did yer come?"

"For the rights of one who has suffered for years," said the Denverite quickly, and his eyes snapped as he spoke.

"Not ter help Merciless Maud?"

"No."

"But ter help some woman?"

"Yes."

"Does she hate me?"

"I don't know."

"Who is she?"

Despite the menacing revolver gripped by the desperado's hand, despite, too, the dark finger that seemed to press the trigger, and the cold, black eyes that glared above it, the Denver Dandy stepped quickly toward Paradise Paul.

"I came byer in the interest of the girl's mother!" he said, in thrilling tones. "Paradise Paul, have you told Alice that she is motherless?"

"I hev. By Heavens, I thought she war!"

The men stood not three feet apart; the hand of one could have touched the shoulder of the other.

"She is alive. She wants her child!" said Broadcloth Burt.

"Prove it."

"If I do will you give her up?"

"Prove it, I say."

"I want no man's blood," was the response. "But I have taken an oath that Alice shall be restored to her mother's arms. I generally keep my word, and this one shall prove no exception to the rule."

"But you haven't proved thet Alice's mother is alive. Broadcloth Burt, I want no Denver game played in this wild city—no cold deck shall be set up and succeed on me!"

"Go with me to your cabin and I will prove it. I've got the proof in black and white."

"You hev, eh? I'm dyin' ter see it, Denver."

"To your shanty, then."

Instantly the revolver of the desperado fell, and he threw a quick look at the speechless pards, who had not for a moment removed their eyes from the pair.

"That is a truce between Denver an' Deadwood till daylight," he said. "If this man proves what he says he can prove, the truce may be extended; if he fails, I swear by my mother's love thet it shall be war to the knife! Let Broadcloth an' me determine what it shall be. If peace, I sha'n't break it; if war, somebody shall die!"

The Denverite heard all with manifest impatience.

"To my shanty, now," continued Paradise

Paul, looking at the man from Denver. "I'm no kitten, if I hev been robbed ov one ov my paws. Foller me."

He turned, confident that he would be followed by the man he addressed, nor was he mistaken.

Equally confident that no bullets would be fired into his back by the thirty pards left behind, Broadcloth Burt stepped quickly after him, and the two men, representatives of the rival silver towns, were walking side by side through the cool shadows of the morning stars.

Paradise Paul was eager to reach the cabin he had left but a few moments before, and not a word was spoken by either until the captain of the Deadwood toughs sprung across the threshold of his shanty and whirled upon the man behind him.

"You say you hev the proof in black an' white," he said. "Produce it now."

With a deliberation that was perplexing, Broadcloth Burt ran one hand beneath his coat and found something he had lately put away—a bit of neatly-folded paper, whose creases bore the impress of a woman's care.

"There! you can read!" he said, throwing the little packet upon the table at which Paul stood, impatient for his enemy's reply.

Instantly the one hand of the Deadwooder pounced upon the paper and began to unfold it, watched closely, triumphantly, by his single companion.

"Hang me! ef you haven't a document ov some kind hyer," he said, while he worked. "Ef it proves that Alice's mother is still alive it'll skunk my time all holler."

"That paper will not lie," said the Denver sport, with pride, "because she who wrote it is above lying!"

At last Paradise Paul got the paper unfolded and was mastering its contents, a task which, from his imperfect education, was herculean.

"An' this proves it, eh?" he suddenly exclaimed, looking up as he turned to the man waiting quietly the result. "Thar's no name to this paper—only 'The Patient One.'"

The speaker's voice was full of derision.

"Only 'The Patient One,'" repeated Broadcloth Burt. "I know it; but that woman is Alice's mother."

"Oho! Alice isn't mentioned in this document. You'll hev ter hev better proof than that."

The hidden lips of the Denver dandy proudly curled at this expression, and a tigerish snap lit up his eyes.

"It doesn't satisfy you, I see," was all he said, but his voice was the ominous rumble that sometimes precedes a terrible tempest.

"What does it prove?" sneered the captain of the toughs, holding forth the letter. "Thar's no name to it. An' you had it in black an' white, too! Is that the way they do business at Denver?"

"Yes! It is no proof to you, maybe, but to me, villain, it is all I want. I know that she who wrote that letter is Alice's mother. She wants her child—the one you have kept among the worst set ov men that ever breathed. Oh, I'm here in Deadwood—in the lion's den and without a friend; I know all that. You needn't tell me with your eyes that you will not let Alice go peaceably to that mother who is ready to die when she has kissed her child. I have sworn that she shall, and I will not fail to keep that oath!"

"Mebbe you will an' mebbe you won't, an' ther chances ar' that ye won't!" was the reply. "You'd better go back ter Denver an' console the patient one thar. I give the girl up on no such proof as that. I've raised her ter believe thet her mother is dead, an' since you an' a woman in Denver hev put up a job, dead ter Alice her mother shall ever be! Paradise Paul an' thirty pards, each one more dangerous than a dozen wildcats, stand while blood flows between that girl an' you—between her an' the woman in Denver! When you landed in Deadwood I smelled a scheme—a cold deck, an' I hit it hard, too. Broadcloth Burt, Big Jehu goes back at daylight. Hadn't you better go along an' report ter yer female pard?"

"Not without the girl!" grated the Denver dandy, and a quick stride carried him to Paradise Paul with the suddenness of the dropping of a thunderbolt.

"Look here, you daisy devil," he went on as his dark eyes flashed and his hands fell like trip-hammers on the villain's shoulders.

"If it is to be war an' war to the knife, war let it be! I wasn't born in good clothes thet I can't strip at any time and fight the meanest wolves thet ever sneaked at a leader's heels. I proclaim my intentions. I am after the girl Alice. If you and the thirty pards are willing to empty their veins to circumvent me, I shall accommodate you at any time. Would a woman with a heart write the letter I have shown you and lie? Would a mother on a sick bed send me to Deadwood for a girl who was not her child? I am for the woman who wrote that letter. Set your infernal wolves on my track. Let the truce you proclaimed at the Casino be broken now—at this minute! Make it war to the knife and the knife to the hand t' it gives it motion. When it comes to the test I will doff

my kids and handle the thirty pards of Deadwood—your thirty human devils with naked hands! The girl goes back to her waiting mother. She goes thar in spite of Merciless Maud, the Mormon Spider, Bowie Bluff, and all the villains that call Deadwood home! Cram this into your pipe, Paradise Paul, and enjoy a smoke at your leisure!"

That was all, but heavens! was it not enough? The gloved hands of Broadcloth Burt, the elegant, fell from Paul's shoulders, and he stepped slowly back.

It took Paradise Paul a moment to recover.

"Denver and Deadwood!" hissed the captain of the toughs. "We know one another fully at last. It shall be war to the knife 'twixt the two towns; but don't forget fer a minute thet it's thirty ag'in' one!"

"I'll not forget," and Broadcloth Burt stepped across the threshold. "Let it be war to the very hilt of the border blades. Denver against Deadwood! I am satisfied!"

"Jehosaphat! what a man!" fell from Paradise Paul's lips when he found himself once more the only occupant of his little shanty which a few moments before he had left at the words of an unknown tongue which had told him that the Denverite was a prisoner at the Full-Hand.

"The game he plays for Alice shall be his last. The paper from Denver failed ter prove a winnin' hand. If I with thirty men like my pards at my back, can't scoop him, then let me feed the Black Hills vultures afore the week's end! But whar is Alice just now?—thet's the question."

"I can tell ye," said the man who appeared at the door at that moment. "She's done a trick you'd never hev thought ov, cap'n. She's eloped with Colonel Sandbanks!"

Paradise Paul uttered a cry.

"With that old skunk? It's a lie!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

HUNTERS THREE.

If the belle of Deadwood had actually gone off with the proprietor of the Setemup, she had done that which nobody in the town had never dreamt of.

The sudden announcement seemed to stagger Paradise Paul, and the words "It's a lie!" dropped involuntarily from his lips.

What! Alice left town of her own free will with Simon Sandbanks?

Impossible!

"I don't pretend ter lie, cap'n," remarked the bearer of the disagreeable tidings, seeing the doubt expressed by Paul's flashing eyes. "I only say that thet's just what ther girl hez done—nothin' more, nothin' less."

"With thet skunk!" cried the captain of the Deadwood toughs. "Thet's her way ov gettin' even with me, I suppose. With Simon Sandbanks!—with the meanest human critter thet ever sot foot in Deadwood! Thet's a good deal for a feller ter stand, an' hang me up by the heels! ef I'm goin' ter stand it, either. Give me yer proof."

"Wal, the kernul left Deadwood two hours ago."

"Wal?"

"He rode one horse an' led another."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite, cap'n. Under the big tree just out ov town on the Deadwood trail, a woman war waitin' fer him. I measured the foot-prints thar."

"An' Alice's feet would hev filled them, eh?"

"I'd swear ter it."

"Ov her own accord! Thet's what riles me! Ef he had abducted the girl—carried her off ag'in' her will, it wouldn't look so bad; but fer her to go off with him of her own accord now—just when I want ter keep her whar I kin protect her—it's a durned shame! She shall be hunted down; both shall be overhauled, an' the old forty-niner will wish thet he never saw Deadwood. I've just had a visitor 'twixt whom an' me thar's got ter be war ter the knife."

"I saw him leave the shanty just before I came up."

"That war the chap, Broadcloth Burt. Got me hyer from the Casino ter prove suthin' startlin' ter me; but he failed."

"He hasn't left town yet, cap'n," suggested the Deadwooder's auditor.

"Let him go. He'll hang around hyer till he diskivers that Alice is gone. When war you in Denver last, Mike?"

"Last month."

"It's a good while ago; but did you ever see or hear ov a woman thar what war waitin' fer a lost child er suthin' ov that sort?"

"Never struck a lead ov that kind anyhow," was the answer. "War thet his story?"

Captain Paul made no reply, though he seemed on the point of making an injudicious admission when he suddenly checked himself.

"I only wanted ter know," he said, after a pause. "Now, we'll go back ter Alice. Gone clean off with Colonel Sandbanks! It disgraces Deadwood. Say, isn't it high day ag'in'?"

"I'll strike that station mighty soon."

"Then go an' hunt up the pards I name an' send 'em hyer at once. What is ter be done must be done quickly. No time fer foolin' now. The girl must come back hyer—back to Dead-

wood! I say so, an' I am Paradise Paul. That patient woman story is a transparent lie. He's been hyer long enough ter hev fixed up a thousand tales. Send me Colorado Clate, Monte Mark, an' Idaho Hal. With my pick from the thirty pards I could find a needle in a lead mine. I want those three; thet's all. Go an' find them fer me."

The man departed and Paradise Paul leaned against the cabin door pale, but wild-eyed, and with the cool wind of morning playing against his cheek.

"A woman in Denver Alice's mother? I will not believe it!" he murmured. "Broadcloth Burt has fixed the yarn up for a purpose; but he hit me too late. Alice has run off with the most despicable man in Deadwood, an' I am now confronted with a lie. Oh, I'm willin' fer it ter be war, Denver Burt; you've thrown down the challenge an' we've already picked it up. When I get my hands on Alice ag'in, I'll ask you what ye'r goin' ter do about it. One-armed it is true, but for all thet I'm still better than twenty-two hundred devils!"

He laughed at his own words and stood in the door until he was joined by three bronzed athletes who came up in the first streaks of day, and halted in his presence.

"Mike found you, eh?" said Paul eying the trio with much apparent satisfaction.

"He found us together, Paul. Does that astonish you?" was the reply.

"Not at all. He told you thet I want you, I guess?"

"Thet's what he said."

"Wal, I do. Come into the shanty. We'll say what we've got ter say under kiver."

Paradise Paul drew back into the house and was followed by the three toughs who seemed eager to hear him proceed.

"I've been hit hard—a reg'lar side-wipe," grated Paul continuing, as he leaned against the rough table and faced his men. "Now don't make a fuss over what I shall say, fer it'll be no use. Thar's work ahead an' we must lose no time indignatin'. Alice hez eloped with Simon Sandbanks."

The three pards started visibly.

"Thet's the way I acted when I heard it," said Paul with a smile. "She's gone, sure enough. Mike has proof enough. But what stirs up all the tiger in me is the diskivery thet the keeper ov the Setemup didn't hev ter carry her off. She went with him ov her own accord."

"No!" exclaimed the three in chorus.

"She did nothin' less—cuss the girl! I raised her fer suthin' better'n thet!" And Paul's hand rattled an' emphasis on the table. "I want 'em both—Alice an' her enticer. Heaven knows by what lies he coaxed her off. I'm not goin' ter stop ter inquire now. I want them both."

"All right, cap'n. We've been sp'ilin' fer suthin'—fer suthin' more excitin' than the hangin' ov a Mormon dog. But what's become ov Broadcloth Burt—the Denver doll thet slid out ov our clutches at the Casino last night?"

"Let him hang about Deadwood er, vamoose, just ez he pleases—fer the present. We had a racket hyar arter the scene down thar. I know what brought him ter Deadwood, an' yer shall know when I want ye ter. Alice an' thet bash-mixer first. I can't go just now; this arm must get a start on ther road ter healin'. I trust you three, tharfore I exact no oath. I want Alice hyar afore night, an' ther colonel, too. They haven't got much start. She waited fer him at the big tree on the Denver trail, Mike says. Now go!"

Eager to send the three pards on the hunt of Alice, Paradise Paul dismissed them with a wave of the hand.

He knew his men, for each of the thirty pards had been tested before and not one had been found wanting in either courage or devotion.

This desperate league had existed since the foundation of Deadwood, and its members obeyed their chosen captain always cheerfully, and without as much as a semblance of a murmur.

At the wave of Paul's bronzed hand Colorado Clate, Monte Mark and Idaho Hal filed from the cabin and left its master once more alone.

"It warn't our business ter ask questions," said the first named of the three when the trio had thrown themselves into the saddle a short distance from Paul's cabin. "I don't know about Simon Sandbanks coaxin' a girl like the Deadwood daisy off with him. I told ye what happened arter the Denver stage came in last night—how Big Jehu fetched Broadcloth Burt a letter from below, how I found him bendin' over that Mormon spider what he picked up on the trail, an' how I gave old Timothy a bullet only ter see thet blamed driver tote him toward Utah? Wal, it does look ter me thet we'll find Alice somewhar else than ridin' beside old Sandbanks. But ther cap'n's orders stare us in the face. He says they're together, an' mebbe he knows. But look hyar. We're leavin' Broadcloth Burt behind, thet's fer Iron-Grip isn't far off, an' yer don't know how nigh thet Mormon viper is—Merciless Maud. It's a precious lay-out, but we can't help it. It's for us to run the kernul down. Paul an' the pards thet stay back must keep their end up hyar."

"Thet's their lookout," said Monte Mark.

"Our duty is ter find the landlord ov ther Setemup. Off we ar!"

The three pards touched their horses with the spur and dashed away in the first flushes of dawn, observed by a few who were early astir, and those who in the Full-Hand Casino had turned night into day.

"That means something," said a man who from a window of the Setemup, believed to be entirely without a tenant, as his eye followed the three horsemen. "It may be the beginning of the war to the knife proclaimed by Paradise Paul, but I confess that I don't exactly understand this daybreak gallop from Deadwood. Those left behind will be looking for me no doubt. Well, gentlemen, I am here—a rather dangerous customer, and may be you'd better not tackle me."

The speaker looked toward the two heavy revolvers that lay on a table near by and within reach of his hands, and his handsome eyes glowed like twin stars.

It was our old acquaintance, Broadcloth Burt, and he appeared quite at home in the little upper room of the Setemup, with his feet elevated on the table, and a cigar held coolly between his teeth.

When he glanced from the window again the three toughs had disappeared, an event which did not seem to disturb him in the least.

"Well, if I haven't landed in a den of tigers, set me down for a dolt!" he suddenly laughed. "I am pitted against them all, and just because I want to heal a suffering woman's heart. But I'll do it! Oh, Paradise Paul, you may sneer down the letter I threw on your table; but I'll bring about the time when you'll cower before the merciless avenger of guilt."

He might have said more, for he seemed in a talkative mood; but as he paused the door of his room began to open, and when it was wide enough to admit the head of a man, the Denver dandy had thrust forward his two revolvers.

"Come in!" he said, in tones of stern command. "You want to see me. I am here. Come in, or I'll kill you on the spot!"

CHAPTER XIX.

BOWIE BLUFF'S "TRADE."

BROADCLOTH BURT knew that the door had not opened of its own accord; but we do not think he could have guessed the identity of the man behind it.

His last words were calculated to either bring the spy forward, or make him beat a precipitate retreat.

It had the first-named effect.

The last word had scarcely ceased to resound ere the face of the visitor appeared, and leered with remarkable coolness into the Denverite's face.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Broadcloth Burt with a smile of disappointment. "Do you want to see me?"

"Wal, I warn't nosin' 'round fer you exactly, but since I've found you, we might hev a confab. Kin I sit down?"

"Stand whar you are," was the uncompromising reply. "It appears to me that you are working out of your territory. Don't they miss you at Iron-Grip?"

"Oh, I dunno," and the captured spy, who was our former acquaintance, Bowie Bluff, attempted a smile in the face of Denver Burt's revolver, but it was a sickly one.

"I've heard of men turning up missing that never got home again," the Denver sport continued, "but maybe Iron-Grip can spare certain of its citizens."

"Mebbe she kin," was the desperado's observation. "See hyar, Broadcloth; I'll be squar' with ye. I didn't expect ter find ye hyar, that's a fact. I war lookin' fer ther kernul."

"He isn't on the premises."

"So I conclude, since I've visited every room in the hotel. He must hev left Deadwood."

"Perhaps."

"Played the coward, just like him. Say, Denver, what'll ye give me ter put ye on ther track ov ther Deadwood queen?"

"Alice?" asked the Denverite, starting.

"No one else! I know suthin'."

"You ought to; you came here with Merciless Maud."

"Not much," denied Bowie Bluff.

The Denver dandy smiled.

"You can't lie to me, Mr. Iron-Grip," he said, looking Bowie Bluff out of countenance with a pair of penetrating eyes. "Merciless Maud will not lie."

"Did she tell you?"

"Perhaps."

"Then I guess I did come ter Deadwood with her," the scamp admitted.

"For a purp—?"

"Kin'ter so."

"Wasn't it to abduct Alice?"

"Who said so?"

"I did; you heard me."

"Now, really, Broadcloth Burt, I'm not on the witness-stand, although I acknowledge thet ye've got ther advantage ov this pilgrim at ther present writin'. Can't we compromise?"

"How?"

"By goin' back ter my original question an'

givin' me an answer. What'll ye give ter find Deadwood's queen? Thet war about ther purport ov it, I b'lieve. Now, Broadcloth, what d'ye say?"

The Denverite did not reply.

"I'm no fool if I did come from Iron-Grip, ther only anti-whisky town in Dakota. You want Alice; you came ter Deadwood arter her."

"Well, if I did, you haven't got her to sell," flashed the Denver sport.

"I hev't, eh?" grinned Bowie Bluff. "Would a man ov my caliber sell a secret ef he hedn't one ter sell?"

The keen eyes of the villain thought they detected an eager start on the Denverite's part.

Bowie Bluff was no fool; he had in his head what might be called an "eye for business."

Broadcloth Burt no longer covered with him the two revolvers, but his fingers still clutched them as they touched the rim of the table at which he sat, and his eyes closely regarded the man from Iron-Grip.

"You sell secrets, do you?" he said sarcastically addressing his visitor. "What's the market price?"

"What'll you give?" asked Bowie Bluff.

"Don't you forget it, Denver, that the easiest way ter win ther game ye came hyar to play is through Bowie Bluff from Iron-Grip. I appreciate the motive that fetched ye hyar. I've dissolved partnership with the woman I jined at this place. My last act wer' to save her from a brace of shunks who war goin' to practice on her hand with ther revolvers. Me an' thet Mormon tigress hev been pards fer a year, but I've left ther firm. I'm not used tersellin' secrets, but I want you ter win."

"You didn't twenty-four hours ago?"

"Thet's a fact, Denver. Ther partnership warn't dissolved then."

"You hate Merciless Maud now, don't you?"

"Not exactly, but I want you to win, don't you see?"

"Certainly. And you will tell me where Alice is for a consideration?"

"Yes."

"Is Maud there, too?"

"I can't just answer that, but I know whar blooms Deadwood's rose. I'm goin' back ter Iron-Grip, Denver. I want ter win my bet when I get thar."

"What's that to me?" asked Broadcloth Burt.

"Suthin' important, mebbe. I bet fifty an' put ther dust up—all I had—when I left that I'd come back inside ov two months with three hundred. I'll throw off twenty-five, Denver, an' run ther risk ov pickin' it up 'twixt hyar and thar on my backward trip. Don't you see it? For two seventy-five I'll guide ye ter Alice."

Broadcloth Burt rose slowly to his feet with his eyes riveted on the man from Iron-Grip.

With noiseless tread he came around the table, holding Bowie Bluff in his spot as if he possessed the powers of fascination.

"You sell me the girl for money, do you?" he hissed in cutting tones. "For two seventy-five you will turn traitor to some one and disgrace Iron-Grip? You've got a liberal conscience to throw off that twenty-five. I don't want Alice in that manner. I don't intend to buy justice by purchasing a traitor."

"Oh, you don't, eh?" sneered Bowie Bluff with tantalizing coolness. "Then I s'pose the trade's off. You don't want ther queen ez bad ez I thought ye did. Wal, thar's another market."

"Not with you for a seller!" came madly over the lips of the Denverite. "Look here, villain. I've a notion to paint the wall behind you with your brains. I will get there in the end, without your assistance. You may sell your infernal secret, but I don't buy it. Git out of this house! It's mine now since the proprietor's gone. I paid in advance for these quarters the day I got here. I don't desire any further acquaintance with a secret seller from Iron-Grip."

"Oh, you don't! The time will come when you'll wish you had traded with me."

"Never! Thar's the door! Git!"

The man from Iron-Grip glanced from the two revolvers that looked into his face to the door standing open prepared for his exit.

"Do you occupy the hull house?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Whar's yer baggage?"

"I will not kill time with you. Bowie Bluff, you must get out of this hotel!"

"Thet's blamed cruel. It's daylight now, an' the toughs ov Deadwood don't like me. Ye ar' goin' ter keep mum hyar till night. What ef our trade did fail. The Setemup's big enough fer both ov us."

"I inhabit it alone," was the stern rejoinder.

"Can you see the door?"

"Kinder so, Broadcloth."

"Then go! I've got the drop on you, and if you are not gone when I have counted, ten, I'll scatter your brains. I'll find Alice without having to buy a secret from a dog that'll howl any way for a bone!"

That seemed to decide the man from Iron-Grip; he stepped back from the revolvers and moved toward the door which was within three feet of the top of the stairs.

After his last words, Broadcloth Burt sealed his lips in a manner which told that he would say no more, and kept eyes and revolvers on the man he had cornered.

He saw Bowie Bluff strike the first step and then move suddenly down the stair.

A hasty stride carried the Denverite across the landing.

At the door below that led into the famous "reception room" of the Setemup, he stopped and glared up into the face of Broadcloth Burt with the savagery of a Comanche.

"Win an' wear, my Denver daisy!" he exclaimed. "Find an' take the Deadwood beauty home—ef ye kin! It'll be a rainy day when ye git ahead ov the man from Iron-Grip. Oh, I'm a Jim-dandy when I'm riled—a reg'lar rip snorter from Snorterville when I'm trod on. When you git the girl an' beat Merciless Maud an' ther rest ov 'em, just drop me a line! It'll do me good ter give you an' yer daisy scheme away. Good-by!"

He made a ludicrous bow as he uttered the parting salute, and vanished from the Denverite's gaze.

"The infamous dog! I might have choked him to death, an' I should have done it. A pistol-shot would have betrayed me. The next time we meet may I be free to treat the villain as he deserves."

Thus spoke Broadcloth Burt as he drew back into the little room beyond the landing.

A moment later he heard the opening and closing of a door.

"Is the man foolish enough to try to leave Deadwood in full view of its toughs?" he asked, stepping to the window. "He has no other way of escape, and a desperate devil like Bowie Bluff will dare any danger."

The man from Denver was right, for the following moment he saw the figure of the desperado in the street in front of the hotel, and caught the flash of his eyes as he glanced up at the window.

"He's going to attempt it," murmured Broadcloth Burt.

All at once four men sprung from the interior of a shanty within pistol-shot of the daring man.

Bowie Bluff halted, and the Denverite involuntarily shrunk from the window.

"Hands up or drop!" exclaimed the four, who seemed to recognize Bowie Bluff at a glance.

He was covered in an instant, and so suddenly that he had not time to put his hand on the six-shooter on his hip.

"They've got you bad, Bowie Bluff," said the Denver dandy from his position in the upper room. "When you get to carry out your schemes, please let me know."

Already the man from Iron-Grip had thrown up one hand, and as the other followed, he wheeled toward the hotel.

"Yonder's a man you want worse than you do me!" he cried, pointing toward Denver Burt's window. "I've just left the Denver devil, an' he's at the mercy ov yer revolvers."

Broadcloth Burt, thanks to a broken glass, heard every word.

"I'll pay him for that low revenge!" he hissed, springing across the room. "We'll end it right here, Mr. Bluff!"

A moment later up went the window, and at the crack of the sport's revolver a man fell forward with a wild cry!

It was Bowie Bluff.

The four sports seemed thunderstruck.

CHAPTER XX.

OVER THE DENVER TRAIL.

A SHORT time before the sharp crack of the Dandy's deadly pistol, the Denver stage, with Big Jehu on the box, left Deadwood and stirred the dust of the old trail.

"G'lang!" rung out his cry, as he cracked his whip over the heads of the horses. "We hev't a passenger yet, but we're goin' ter pick up one afore long, ef ther Mormon's got sense enough ter remain whar I left 'im last night. He's waitin' fer me now, mighty glad ter go back ter ther bosom ov his family; an' ef he doesn't stay thar in ther future, an' quit this risky wife-buntin', he'll wake up some mornin' an' find all his wives widders. Git up! g'lang, my snortin' thoroughbreds!"

And away lumbered the stage, leaving Deadwood behind in a cloud of dust.

Big Jehu was ahead of the three pards, picked from among the thirty by their captain for the search for Alice.

He was anxious to reach the spot where he had left Timothy Tenwives, the Mormon, on the preceding night, not from any love he bore the old polygamist, but from a desire to get him out of the country and baffle the men in Deadwood who wanted his life.

"Hyar we ar! Now for the Denver passenger!" suddenly exclaimed the driver, as he stopped the frisky team, on a certain spot some distance out of Deadwood, and scrambled down from his lofty perch with uncommon agility. "I'm on time, Timothy, so right this way fer Utah!"

He was now among the bushes, and on the

very spot where he had left the Mormon elder, but nobody greeted him.

"Gone! By Jehosaphat, the old viper has changed his mind!" ejaculated Big Jehu, astonished. "I didn't more than half believe his promise, an' I'm not heart-broken over his failure ter keep it. Stay whar ye ar', an' may the toughs ov Deadwood lengthen yer Mormon neck! I'm off fer Denver, with no more halts fer passengers by the way. Hyer we go! G'lang! Denver er bust! May the devil take thet Salt Lake serpent!"

Once more the long-lashed whip cut the fresh morning air with a lively crack, and the stage moved on again.

Big Jehu looked straight ahead, and therefore did not see the man who sprung from a bush-protected covert opposite the spot where he had concealed the Mormon.

The stage-door was already ajar, and the man reached the step and sprung inside without alarming the giant, cracking his whip on the box.

"A free ride, by Jove!" he chuckled to himself. "Mebbe I won't reach Denver ahead ov thet Daisy of the Mountain Top, but I'll git thar in time to play a full hand."

He settled back on the dusty seat in a place safe from Jehu's observation, and tried to appear at his ease, though it cost him an effort.

"I thought I had things about as I wanted 'em last night," he went on as if it did him good to give utterance to his thoughts. "I thought I had Alice in the notion to leave Deadwood with me. She didn't take kindly to my offer of marriage, that's a fact, but afterward she listened attentively when I pictured the trials she'd have ter undergo as Paradise Paul's ward in his tiger's den of a shanty. I got her ter wait fer me under the big tree while I got the horses ready, but when I got thar she was gone. Curse thet she wildcat what came in from Rockerville an' made Broadcloth Burt the laughin'-stock of the thirty toughs on my porch! When Alice went to the tree she fell right into thet woman's clutches. Don't I know it? Thet bit o' paper which I found under the tree said 'to Denver,' an' thet's the pint I'm breakin' fer now. I knew the stage would come along an' I sent my hosses back an' waited for it. You'll beat Colonel Sandbanks to Denver, Merciless Maud, but when he gits thar, keep a tight grip on yer prisoner or lose her. I'm a reg'lar 'forty-niner, an' I learnt more than minin' when I tramped the Sacramento kentry."

It was the colonel, then, and as the stage bore him rapidly over the roughened trail, he seemed perfectly satisfied that he was being carried to ultimate success.

Big Jehu on the box was totally oblivious of the passenger who had stolen into the stage, and was being whirled toward a destination which he was burning to reach.

"Hello! somebody's tryin' to catch the stage!" suddenly cried Simon Sandbanks as his eyes dilated at sight of three horsemen who had suddenly appeared on the trail. "Hang me! if they don't look like some of Deadwood's cut-throat citizens. They ar' an' they want ter overtake the stage! Why doesn't Big Jehu look behind him an' diskiwer them? I'm armed, thank Heaven. If they want me, an' they may if Paradise Paul sent 'em out, I'll have to fight—fight like a Californy lion!"

Nearer and nearer came the three riders, and Colonel Sandbanks swore roundly in his mind as he observed that the horses attached to the stage had not increased their gait.

"I'm ter be dragged out and pulled up like a coyote, I s'pose," growled the proprietor of the Setemup. "Already I'm an exile from Deadwood, an' I'm to suffer still more unless this durned vehicle moves faster. What ails the galoot on the box? Mebbe the sinner's gone to sleep."

In the colonel's opinion, matters were assuming a desperate shape, for the three toughs would soon overtake the Denver stage, unless Big Jehu whipped up and swore roundly at the horses.

All at once the whip began a succession of cracks that sounded like pistol reports, and the driver filled the air with vociferous "g'langs," and numerous oaths which the horses very well understood.

"Waked up at last, but mebbe just too late!" exclaimed Sandbanks. "We'll go along lively now fer awhile. Put yer hosses to their utmost, my friend of the whiplash, for them Deadwood animals ar' no slouches."

By this time the horses were fully under way, and the stage, heavy as it was, was skurrying down the trail like mad.

Colonel Sandbanks was forced to hold to the back of the seat to keep from being thrown across the vehicle with a force suggestive of not only bruises, but broken bones.

The horses plunging along under the urgings of the man who held the lines, kept their feet better than the stage maintained its equilibrium.

Sometimes a bowlder would throw the vehicle almost over on its side, then a sudden lurch would toss it in the opposite direction, much to the passenger's rage and the destruction of his peace of mind.

"Blamed ef this isn't worse than hangin'!" gasped Sandbanks, who felt like he was fast being shaken to pieces. "Another mile of such infernal journeyin' will land me in Hades instead of Denver! I can't see the three toughs for the dust-clouds, but they're keepin' on all the same. I wish Jehu'd ease up a minute an' give me a chance to get a good squar' breath."

Vain were the colonel's wishes. "Them three road-agents don't git the little dust I have got without a race for it!" shot the driver from behind clinched teeth as he sent defiant glances over his shoulder toward his pursuers. "I've got no passenger ter be shaken up an' I shall put the horses through. Git up! Wizard! Sarpint! do yer duty. It's Denver ag'in' Deadwood! G'lang! Let 'em catch us if they kin!"

The stage swaying like mad from side to side did not seem to touch the ground at times.

"Hold on thar! for Heaven's sake!" cried the passenger. "When I next try ter steal a ride may I be kicked to the coast! I'm no rubber ball. Look hyar! You're breakin' a mortal man all up! I won't stand it!"

Colonel Sandbanks fell rather than sprung into one of the forward corners of the lumbering stage.

The next moment he had thrust his head out and was shouting wildly to Big Jehu.

"I'm willin' to face them three villains, only I don't want to be thumped to death!" he cried. "Pull up an' let me out, or go slower till I get a solid purchase ov a first-class breath."

The speaker was a spectacle. The yellowish dust kicked up by horses and stage had mingled with the perspiration which trickled down his face, and rendered him not only unrecognizable but made him present a ludicrous aspect.

Big Jehu almost fell from his seat at sight of the face presented to his gaze from the window of the stage which he thought was entirely empty.

"Who ar' you?" he cried. "You warn't in thar when I left Deadwood!"

"No; an' I wish I wasn't in here now," said the colonel. "My name is Simon Sandbanks—"

"You the landlord ov the Setemup?—I guess not! Just hold on to the furniture inside whoever you ar', an' I'll land ye in Denver or bust."

"Heavens, no! I can't hold on. I could use a squar' yard of court plaster now. I'm Simon Sandbanks, of the Setemup. Those villains back yonder want me—not your freight. This ride is worse than a lariat."

"We'll hit the down grade in a few moments; then the old vehicle won't touch ground fer three miles."

"Heavens! You don't want ter carry a corpse into Denver!"

"Hardly, kernul; but—"

"Let me out an' then go down the grade without a passenger. You can't outstrip the Deadwood toughs."

"Can't, eh? Just compose yourself an' see."

"I'd sooner roost on a gridiron than endure this tumble another mile."

"Git out, then!" and Big Jehu straightened on his box and once more his stentorian "g'lang!" echoed among the wild scenery.

Colonel Sandbanks threw at the merciless driver a look of unutterable despair.

"Yes, get out!" he grated. "I'd like to know how a man can leave a stage as crazy as this one is. It'll go down the grade on its side as sure as sin! If I thought I could stop the horses, I'd shoot that heartless galoot from his box; but I'm afraid it wouldn't do. Come on, Deadwood toughs. Shoot the hound thet holds the lines an' then we'll settle with each other. By George! I wish—"

The colonel's sentence was broken by the reports of two shots and as many bullets whizzed past the stage.

"Thet's right! make the mad galoot pull up!" he exclaimed. "I'm the deadeat living man thet ever bounced over this infernal trail."

A puff of wind which at that moment lifted the cloud of dust behind the vehicle, showed the three Deadwooders not more than three hundred yards in the rear.

"It'll soon be settled," said Sandbanks, but the dust-covered man on the box was not of that opinion.

As he ground his teeth, he threw the lines over an iron hook at one side of the seat, and made them fast, leaving the horses to plunge on down the trail.

Then drawing two large revolvers, he crept back over the top of the vehicle, braced his feet at each side, and looked toward the Deadwood riders.

"This vehicle goes to Denver without bein' overhauled!" he said. "Come a little nigher, my Deadwood pinks, an' I'll form out o' yer bodies thet ghastliest bouquet thet ever withered on this old trail."

The trio came on, in their bronzed hands the deadly six-shooters of the Northwest, and fury in their eyes.

"Halt! thet's nigh enough!" suddenly rung out the clarion tones of the man on the roof of the stage.

"He's goin' ter fight!—the fool!" exclaimed the colonel. "I hope the three pards won't

halt. I'm as sick as a kitten. Thar isn't a whole bone in my anatomy."

The response to Big Jehu's demand was a defiant yell, and three shots, from as many revolvers.

"That gives me a chance!" said the driver, and then he opened on his pursuers.

At the first shot one saddle was emptied, and at the second another tough threw up his hands.

"Jehosaphat!" gasped Simon Sandbanks. "He's already killed two men an' the hosses ar' running away!"

CHAPTER XXI.

COLONEL SANDBANKS AS A LION.

THE third horseman, the last of the Deadwood trio, was nothing daunted by the fate of his companions.

"I'll have that whip-cracker's life for his work!" he hissed, as he threw himself along the neck of his charger, and struck him revengefully with the spurs.

It was now nip and tuck between Colorado Clate and the stage.

The strong steeds were dashing down the grade at the top of their speed, and the vehicle at times seemed not to touch the ground.

Big Jehu, still on the roof, and seemingly unmindful of the speed attained by the horses, was watching for an opportunity to tumble his pursuer over, while in the interior of the stage, gasping for breath and clinging to the bench-seat, was the proprietor of the Setemup, too far gone with fright to articulate a single word.

Such was the spectacle presented on the Denver trail.

Colorado Clate rode straight for the stage, eluding all Big Jehu's efforts to get in an extra shot.

His steed came rushing on with the impetuosity of a tornado, and a wild yell parted his lips as all at once he dashed past the stage, and reached the head of the foremost horse despite the driver's attempts to fetch him down.

"I'll stop the shebang!" he said, and thrusting a revolver against the head of the nearest horse he sent a bullet crashing through its skull.

It was cruel, but it put a stop to the flight, for the next moment the stage and the horses made up a promiscuous heap on the trail, and the dashing runaways stopped in a second!

Colonel Sandbanks was almost thrown through the rear door by the sudden stop, and Big Jehu, despite his attempts to keep his perch, was jerked loose and sailed over the heads of the team to land roughly on the hard ground twenty feet away.

He had lost his pistols and stood at the mercy of the desperado whose comrades he had killed.

"Hands up! Thar!" said Colorado as the driver instantly obeyed. "This is the last drop anybody will ever hold on you, Jehu! Two ov ther best pards thet ever cut a poker-deck lie back thar, wiped out. I could take ye back ter Deadwood an' give ther pards a little diversion, but I prefer to revenge Monte Mark an' Idaho Hal myself."

There came no command to prepare for death; the stage-driver knew that he was to die where he stood, nor was he mistaken.

Hard upon the last sentence of the Deadwood tough came the sharp crack of his revolver, and Big Jehu dropped his brawny arms and fell dead in his tracks—shot through the head!

"Thet Deadwooder means business," ejaculated Colonel Sandbanks. "If he's goin' ter keep thet up I'll be the next victim. By George! I'm goin' ter prepare for the worst. If I die, I'll do it honorin' the days of '49."

His hand moved toward the belt he had strapped about his waist previous to leaving Deadwood, but alas! it was empty and he uttered a cry of despair.

"The six-shooter was shaken from its pocket by the Jehu's fast driving," he said. "It's a wonder my stomach wasn't turned inside out. I'm completely at that villain's mercy. I'm in for it, fer all thet the term implies."

At that moment the slayer of Big Jehu turned to the stage.

"Come down from thet stage!" he said, catching sight of the man inside.

"Thet's just what I war about to do," answered the colonel, and he scrambled out with more haste than ceremony. "Here I am, Colorado, Colonel Simon Sandbanks, on his way ter Denver on business."

A faint smile appeared at the corners of the Deadwood desperado's mouth.

"Ez innocent ez a turtle," he said sarcastically. "Look hyar, old hash-mixer; whar's the Deadwood daisy?"

"To whom do you refer?"

"No assumed ignorance, or I'll make you thet man's eternal pard," and Colorado glanced at the body lying motionless down the trail. "You know who I mean. You ran Alice off last night."

"By my life! I didn't," asseverated the colonel with a solemnity that should have carried conviction with it.

"No lies!" said the tough sternly, and his revolver covered the landlord of the Setemup.

"You've lived in Deadwood long enough, kernul, to know that not one of them Thirty Pard's stand any foolishness. Now, I b'long ter that rather hard crowd, an' I shoot. Out with the truth, kernul."

"I will. I don't know whar Alice is."

"You had her ter wait fer ye at the big tree last night."

"That's correct, but when I got thar she war gone."

Colorado Clate sent a searching look into the colonel's face.

"Hev I struck the wrong trail after all?" he asked himself. "I have found one of the persons we were commanded to run down, but ther most important one, ther cap'n's girl, is not with him. Ef ther kernul lies why would I find him goin' ter Denver alone? You will swear to yer statement, kernul?" he asked aloud.

"By the heavens overhead!" exclaimed Simon Sandbanks, elevating one hand. "Alice went toward the tree, but she either gave me the slip, or else she fell back into the hands of that infernal woman!"

The Deadwood tough started visibly.

"I'll trust you," he said, and Sandbanks drew a genuine breath of relief when he saw himself no longer covered by the easy-triggered weapon. "Stand whar ye are a minute."

Colorado Clate moved toward the horses, two of which had righted themselves, but the third unhurt one was held down by the dead body of his companion.

Whipping out a bowie, the desperado leaned over and severed several parts of the heavy harness, which let the animal up, and then, leading it by the rein, he rode back toward the colonel.

"Kin you ride without a saddle, kernul?" he asked, smiling as he halted in front of the Deadwooder.

"I kin if I have to," was the reply. "Am I ter continue my journey on horseback?"

"You ar' goin back ter Deadwood with me."

"Now?"

"Right away."

"Who wants me thar?"

"Cap'n Paul. He sent three ov us arter you, kernul, but I'm ther only one ov ther set what reached ther game. You about face hyar. Instead ov Denver, you'll hev ter put up with Deadwood fer ther present."

Colonel Sandbanks felt a nameless shiver run through his frame, but he braced up and looked Colorado Clate squarely in the face.

"You have no authority to take me back to Deadwood," he said. "I didn't abduct the girl; she didn't go off with me. You kin go back an' report to Paradise Paul that you know she's not with me. You don't want to ruin my business, do you?"

"Not exactly—"

"Then, go back an' report so that I can make my way to Denver on the important business that calls me thar."

"I can't do that. Ther cap'n wants you just ez bad ez yer business down yonder does," was the pitiless reply. "Kernul I'm sorry I can't accommodate ye. It's got ter be Deadwood instead ov Denver."

Colonel Sandbanks ground his teeth.

"I guess I'll hev ter go back among the Deadwood alligators," he muttered. "Paradise Paul hez nipped all my plans in the bud. I'll not get ter snatch Alice from Merciless Maud in Denver, but by the eternal heavens! if they monkey with me, I'll kill somebody in Deadwood! I'm no kid-gloved milk-an'-water dandy, if I hev kept a hotel. I'm a relic of '49, an' somebody will find it out ef they try to blow the horns b'longin' ter this band-wagon."

He appeared to submit to the inevitable without another protest, and climbed upon the back of the stage-horse with more alacrity than a person knocked about as he had been is supposed to possess.

"Turn over yer pill-boxes, kernul," said Colorado Clate stretching forth a hand for the prisoner's weapons.

"I've got none," replied Sandbanks opening his coat and displaying his defenseless condition. "I lost 'em in that memorable jolt over ther Denver trail, an' in another mile I should hev been turned wrong side out."

"Very well. To Deadwood then."

Side by side toward the north, or back to the sanguinary capital of the Black Hills, rode the proprietor of the Setemup and his swarthy captor.

Colorado Clate looked mad and disappointed, mad because he had lost two courageous pard's, and disappointed because he had not effected the objects of his expedition.

"Take me straight to the old stand," said the colonel as they galloped into the suburbs of Deadwood. "Remember that I am a citizen of Deadwood, and entitled to all ov its privileges. Cap'n Paul can call at the Setemup ef he wants ter see me. He—heilo! they've had a fire in town."

Colorado's countenance quickly changed, but he made no reply; he did not even notice the colonel's request.

There had been a fire in Deadwood, and as the two men turned into the street that ter-

minated before the Setemup, a loud mad cry parted Simon Sandbanks's lips.

"My God! the Setemup is gone!" he exclaimed.

"That's about the way it looks, kernul," was the cool, unconcerned reply. "I can't take ye to ther old stand now."

"No, an' I don't want ter go thar. Take me to the meanest skunk in Deadwood—the man you call Cap'n Paul. Do you hear me remark, Colorado?"

"To Cap'n Paul you go, kernul, an' I caution you to be docile when you git thar, too. Paradise hez been robbed ov a hand an' he's not ez patient as a seraph. Put a stiff bit in yer mouth, an' keep it thar while ye'r' with him. This Alice bizness riles him to ther bone."

"I'm no boy ter be advised," snapped the colonel, as he sent a swift mad glance toward the blackened ruins of Deadwood's "first and only" hotel. "Show me yer one-handed blood-sucker."

The horses' heads were turned and the two men rode away.

Turning into another street a minute afterward they came upon a crowd of dark-shirted men, more than twenty in all, in front of a small cabin.

"Ther cap'n must be holdin' a levee," said Colorado with a glance at his prisoner. "It's not a very good time ter interview him, but—"

"I'll see him if ther hull gang's at his back!" was the interruption. "Brought back ter see my hotel burned at his command, I'll hev satisfaction if it hez ter be his blood!"

At that moment a loud shout arose from the throats of several men in front of the cabin, and Colorado and his prisoner were then espied by all.

Colonel Sandbanks shut his jaws hard, and pushed on with a mad, contemptuous look at the Deadwood toughs.

"Whar's ther cap'n?" asked Colorado of the crowd in general.

"On the inside, but—"

"I'll announce myself!" exclaimed Simon Sandbanks driving the horse among the toughs, who separated. "He wants to see me I hear an' I've got business with him now!"

He reached the open cabin door before one of the forty hands could detain him, and the next moment he was inside.

"Don't let him touch the cap'n!" cried several loud voices. "He's weaker ner a baby. We hed hell in Deadwood just afore daylight. Broadcloth Burt—"

The interruption came from the interior of the cabin.

"Hyar you are, Paradise Paul! Now I'll pay you back for the burnin' of my hotel!"

It was Colonel Sandbanks's charging cry, and the men who rushed into the hut saw him spring at the man stretched on a lot of skins.

"Colorado fetched no infant back over ther Denver trail!" pealed from his throat. "I'll choke all the villainy forever from yer nature, Cap'n Paul!"

An instant later the infuriated landlord of the Setemup was seized by three dusky hands, and lifted bodily from the floor but another human rose with him.

His fingers, eager for revenge, seemed to have met in Paradise Paul's throat, and the toughs could not shake him loose.

It was the wildest moment that Deadwood had witnessed for some time.

Paradise Paul was helpless, weak, senseless, perhaps dead!

The Deadwooders tugged at the maddened colonel's hands; the uproar increased, men swore and drew knives and revolvers, the inside of the cabin was a surging mass.

At last Cap'n Paul was wrenched from the demon's grasp, and the man who fell under the feet of the toughs was the colonel.

CHAPTER XXII.

FROM HORROR TO DESPAIR.

READER, let us turn from the turmoil that excites Deadwood and seek out two of the characters of our story from whom we have been separated for some time.

You have been left to imagine Colonel Sandbanks's surprise and disappointment when he reached the tree by the Denver trail and discovered that Alice whom he expected to meet was not there.

In a moment of excitement the girl had promised to accompany him to a place—to Denver, perhaps—where she would escape the rage of Paradise Paul rendered desperate and heartless by the loss of his hand.

Had she reconsidered her promise and left the rendezvous before the colonel's arrival, or had she fallen back into the hands of Merciless Maud?

The morning light that witnessed Simon Sandbanks's rough ride in the Denver stage and Big Jehu's gallant defense of the vehicle, saw also the Mormon Exile leaning against her horse a short distance from the trail.

"He thought I wouldn't get the girl again," the avenger said to herself. "He thought that although I robbed him of a hand he would keep the girl he has raised, but he is mistaken. I have the beauty again. I had her once before,

but she escaped and went back to Deadwood—back even to the old cabin where Broadcloth Burt rescued her from his fury. Let them battle me if they can. I have come hither for revenge, and I will not go back without keeping my oath. Paradise Paul, I have your ward once more, and Merciless Maud will strike you through her."

The woman was too far from the spot where the stage fight took place to hear the cracks of the deadly revolvers, and the well-limbed horse that cropped the rich grass at his feet formed with his mistress a striking picture.

There was a dense thicket of young timber behind the wronged Mormon wife, and a narrow path that led into its depths seemed to suggest that Merciless Maud knew something of the interior.

True it was that Alice of Deadwood had fallen again into the hands of the woman who wanted her for a purpose.

In the middle of the thicket just mentioned, and bound to one of the young trees, stood Paradise Paul's ward.

Merciless Maud had secured her captive, this time beyond the possibility of escape.

While the ropes that secured the girl did not hurt her flesh, they prevented flight, and her pale face told that the short captivity had visibly affected her.

The she vulture of the Black Hills, as we may call Merciless Maud, had swooped down on Alice while she waited for Colonel Sandbanks at the tree, and secured her before she could set up a show of resistance.

It was a "find" that made Maud's black eyes glisten like polished coals, and with a wild exclamation of triumph she placed Alice on a horse and galloped away, while the colonel, flushed with victory, was moving to the rendezvous to be terribly disappointed.

Alice had pleaded with Maud, only to find her heartless and without mercy.

"Not because I hate you, girl, but because I want to strike that villain in the Deadwood cabin!" she had exclaimed, on refusing Alice's appeal for liberty. "I have struck one blow. I shattered his wrist so that he had to sever the tendons and throw the useless hand away. Through you I strike the second blow. The third stroke will kill."

Alice did not speak.

"Then," continued Maud, "then, I will turn upon my other enemy and make him wish that he had never seen the light of day. He completed the wrong Paradise Paul began. He offered me a home after I was driven from Deadwood by the man who believed a lie against my oath, and I lived to discover that the Mormon spider had coiled that lie to accomplish his ends. In the slave-pen over which he rules in Salt Lake City I awoke to the awful horrors of the terrible wrong those two men had done. Then I swore revenge, and for that I am here!"

Alice had heard words similar to these before; she knew that the woman before her had been terribly wronged, and it was not for her to say that she should not take vengeance.

"You will let me tie you," said Maud as daylight began to penetrate the thicket. "You escaped from me the other time, you know. I am going out to watch the trail for awhile. The Deadwood tigers may have scented me—their captain's enemy."

We have seen Merciless Maud watching the trail from her steed's side in the roseate light of morning.

All at once she turned and led the horse back into the thicket.

Alice was still there; this time her ropes had served her well, and Paradise Paul's ward was still in her power.

"They do not come," said Maud, looking at the girl. "Something must have occurred in Deadwood to keep them back. Why doesn't he lead his toughs after me? I wish he would hunt me. I can strike him a blow that will make him rave like a lion."

She advanced until she reached her captive's side.

"What would he say if he should awake some morning and find a new hand on his table?" she suddenly asked.

"A new hand?" repeated Alice. "What do you mean?"

"Ah! you do not know. Let me make it plainer. What would he say if the hand of which I have spoken should be taken from your wrist?"

The villain's ward recoiled with a cry.

"My God! you would not do that?" fell from her lips.

The eyes of the Mormon wife scintillated hatefully, like the orbs of a basilisk.

Her voice sunk to a whisper which resembled the hiss of a serpent.

"What would I not do to torture him?" she said, leaning forward as her hand encircled Alice's arm. "You forget that the work of two men have transformed me into a fiend incarnate. The snows of Dakota and the crimes of Utah have given me a name—Maud, the Merciless!"

Alice wanted to shrink from the scorching eyes, the terrible grasp of that mad woman, but she could not.

"I meant your hand, girl!" Maud went on.

"Do you know that I am going to send it to Paradise Paul's table? That will make him remember me, though I guess he is not likely to forget. There, don't try to kill me with a look. A hundred hands like yours would not pay me for the torture I have endured. It is true, but terrible, that your hand goes to that Deadwood devil's shanty; but you shall not go with it!"

The Mormon's hand slid down the young girl's arm, and did not stop until her long fingers circled her wrist.

Alice never flinched, although the ordeal was terrible, and gave her look for look while her brain seemed to swim.

All at once the gleam of a knife appeared below the Mormon's right hand.

"I pity you, but I hate him!" hissed Maud. "Your hand shall appear to him when he awakens from a feverish dream of his own loss—not the hand of a ghost, but one of flesh and blood, but dead—one which he will recognize in a moment."

"Spare me this!" burst involuntarily from the girl's lips, as the knife crept toward the wrist, guided by the cobra orbs of the wronged wife. "For the love of Heaven, strike him some other way than through me!"

"Fear it, do you?" laughed Maud. "Ah! it would not wound so deep to strike him through another. No, no, my Deadwood flower; I send your hand to him!"

In an instant the pleading look left the girl's eyes, and a flashing one of defiance took its place.

"Not yet!" she cried. "Heaven will not smile upon such a diabolical revenge as yours. I will keep my hand! You shall not send it bloody and mangled to scare the man you hate!"

"Shall not, my dove? You do not know the tiger blood that flows through the veins of Merciless Maud."

The speaker's fingers seemed to sink to the bone in Alice's flesh, as she attempted to free herself from her captor's grasp by a desperate wrench.

It was a useless effort; the ropes and the grip of the Mormon wife would have held a tigress in thrall.

"Your hand for his table!" cried Maud. "We'll take it now, my Deadwood lamb!"

The knife was ready to swoop upon the bloodless wrist of the helpless girl.

She looked at it once, then into the pitiless eyes of the avenging woman, and her lips parted in a wild cry.

"Help! help! for the love of Heaven!"

"There is not help near. You are mine!"

No help near?

Whose glittering eyes were those at the foot of a tree scarcely ten feet away?

Suddenly, like the sudden upward bound of a panther, a human figure left the ground.

"Unhand that girl, viper!" cried a mad voice, and then the speaker rushed forward with an uplifted stick.

Merciless Maud looked at the interferer and turned white with rage.

"Heavens! you here?" she exclaimed.

"I am here! It's a pity I didn't finish you in Utah!"

The Mormon wife dropped Alice's hand, and turned madly upon the man.

"I'll take the flower that lured me to Dakota!" he continued. "Where you ruled for a year, she shall reign a Mormon queen!"

"Not while I can prevent!" flashed Maud.

The next second she leaped like a tigress toward Alice, who saw her intent both in her fiery eyes and gleaming knife.

"I'll kill you before that monster shall bring you down to my level!" she madly hissed.

"You'll do nothing of the kind. I am here, and the girl is mine!"

Just in the nick of time to save Alice from the descending knife, the heavy stick in the hands of the interferer fell upon Maud's head, and she reeled under the crashing blow and sunk down, dropping a bloodless knife.

"Now, my Deadwood dove, haven't I won you fairly?" said the victor, and the next moment Alice was released from the tree, to be clutched by Timothy Tenwives's hands!

CHAPTER XXIII.

AIDED BY THE DEAD.

FOR a minute, heedless of his surroundings, and the senseless woman lying at his feet, the Mormon elder held Alice at arm's length, like a man sometimes holds a prize, and feasted a pair of admiring eyes upon her.

"If I had stayed where Big Jehu left me last night I wouldn't have got here in time," he said. "Fortune seems to be smiling on Timothy Tenwives just now, and he'll make the best of it, too. No, my Deadwood daisy, I will not let you go, for your beauty brought me into this infamous country. I'll take care of you in the future, and I'll see that that tigress yonder gets her hands on you no more."

Alice could not reply to these expressions of triumph.

They emanated from the depths of a villain's heart, and she resolved to add nothing to them by any retort of hers.

The Mormon spider, as he was not inaptly called, could hardly keep from proclaiming his victory in a loud voice to the surroundings.

The Deadwood flower was his at last.

Though he had been driven from Deadwood at a rope's end, and shot, not fatally, unfortunately for Alice, he had triumphed in the end, and now held the winning hand in the game he had planned in secret at his house in Mormon-dom.

"We'll let the tigress go," he said, glancing at Merciless Maud, who showed no signs of life. "She was about to settle you forever when I got in the best lick I ever gave her. She'll not wake up for a spell, for I put a good deal of strength in that blow seen' that I was strikin' for the eleventh Mrs. Tenwives."

Alice recoiled with a shuddering cry, but she did not get beyond the reach of the Mormon's arm.

"Frightened you, did I?" laughed Timothy. "Yes, I struck for the new Mrs. Tenwives. How do you like the prospect ahead, my Deadwood dove? When we get to Salt Lake City I'll make love in the regular way, but here we've got other matters to attend ter. Well, if I haven't passed through tribulations for you, Alice, may I be relegated to a back seat in the new temple. Come! we'll begin the journey at once."

He started off, dragging the reluctant girl after him with one hand, while with the other he clutched the bridle of Maud's horse, which had witnessed all.

The young girl saw that it would be useless for her to demur to these high-handed proceedings, for, without a weapon of any kind at her command, she was helpless in the hands of the Utah villain.

He stepped over Maud with a glance full of hatred and power, and passed from the thicket to the edge of the Denver trail, where he halted and threw anxious glances in both directions.

"This seems to be a dangerous thoroughfare just now," he said aloud, with a look at Alice. "I've tried it myself, and I ought to know. Once the Deadwood toughs tarred and feathered me on it, and then they roped me in the most approved style. But curse them! they didn't crush the Mormon serpent, as they call me; they only bruised his head. I don't like to travel the trail in broad daylight, but I see no other alternative. I've got no business back in Deadwood just now, although there are some villains there with whom I'd like to settle."

He ground his teeth behind the last sentence, and the girl saw rage light up his evil eyes.

"We'll try the southern city now, followin' the Denver trail for awhile. I've got a quiet family down there, girl; the other Mrs. Tenwives will welcome you with outstretched arms, and all will be peace."

"Peace in your house?" cried the girl. "Yes, the peace Maud found there after you lured her into the snare."

"Ho! what has that tigress been telling you?" he cried. "I expect she hasn't painted me in the brightest colors; but she lied—infamously lied when she told you that I haven't a peaceful family."

Alice's only reply was a contemptuous sneer, and she turned from the Mormon with a resolution never to enter the City of the Tabernacle as his intended wife.

Forgetful, as it seemed, that the horse he led was capable of carrying double, Timothy Tenwives kept on down the Denver trail holding his captive firmly by the wrist.

It was slow progress, but he did not appear to note it, for he constantly feasted his eyes on the beautiful girl who had fallen into his power after so many trials and risk of life.

"Won't I astonish the congregation though?" he chuckled under his breath. "But, most of all, won't I create a sensation among the Mrs. Tenwives when I enter the house with the blushing' eleventh partner of my bosom? Ah! Timothy! she's worth wearin' a lariat for. A Mormon doesn't pick up a wife like this one every day."

Thoughts like these occupied the villain's mind as he led horse and captive toward the south.

Deadwood was behind him forever; he had dealt Merciless Maud, his hater and hunter, a blow which had probably put an end to her life trail, and he had but to proceed to Salt Lake City there to reap the reward of his thrilling wife-hunt.

"Mebbe you'd rather ride," he said, turning suddenly upon Alice. "I've got a horse here that looks like a good one, and we might as well put him to use."

The Mormon's captive did not object, but, on the contrary, her eyes lit up with a ray of hope.

Timothy stopped the horse and politely lifted Alice to a seat on the saddle, then, throwing himself on the steed behind her, and grasping the lines by reaching around her body, he started the horse forward.

The heart of the girl fell within her.

She had hoped that the Mormon would walk beside the horse leading him by the bridle, and she had half matured a plan to effect her escape.

"Jehosaphat!" rung suddenly from the spider's lips as he reined in the galloping steed and

almost unseated himself and captive. "What on earth has happened here?"

There was cause enough for this question.

In the trail before him lay an overturned stage coach of the rough mountain pattern, a dead horse, and a little further on, the body of a man!

"Hyer's another providential interference," he continued recovering a little. "This is the stage that was ter have picked me up if I had remained where Big Jehu left me last night. The Deadwood toughs must have follered it and fixed the driver. Wouldn't they have fixed me, though, if they had found me in it? Alice, my dove, I shudder when I think what might have been."

As for the girl, she was gazing speechless at the scene which spoke for itself.

The Mormon seemed to forget that he owed his life to the stalwart driver who lay dead across the trail, for had not Big Jehu carried him from Deadwood only the night before at the risk of his own life?

"We've got ter get around this lay-out," said the Mormon, urging the horse forward. "We can't take another trail for thar's none hyer. So hyer goes, Alice. Thar's but one way ter Salt Lake City!"

He drove his heels madly against the sides of his steed and the animal plunged forward with a snort.

All went well until the horse shied at the mixed heap of harness, stage and horseflesh in the middle of the trail, and went staggering back on his haunches despite the Mormon's efforts to control him.

"Merciful heavens! we shall be unhorsed!" cried the girl.

"Not while I hold the lines," was the retort, but Timothy Tenwives overrated his power.

All at once Merciless Maud's horse plunged forward, as if determined to pass the obstruction, but midway between the stage and Big Jehu's corpse he reared again and reeled aside, throwing his riders to the ground!

It was the work of a second, but it was well done!

Alice landed some distance from her persecutor and in a manner that inflicted no injury.

"I could shoot that horse!" cried the maddened Mormon as he regained his feet. "We'll get to Salt Lake City in spite of him, my Deadwood blossom. What! ain't you goin' ter let me take you on?"

"I am not, sir!" was the quick reply, and the next second the astonished Mormon came to a halt before two outstretched revolvers in the girl's hands. "You see that the dead has given me his pistols. Now, Mormon spider, advance to carry out your intentions and I will send a bullet crashing through your brain!"

Timothy Tenwives had no color, for the girl held Big Jehu's revolvers!

CHAPTER XXIV.

BACK TO THE LIONS' LAIR.

"I HOLD you at my mercy and from the treatment I have received at your hands I ought not to spare," continued Alice sternly, as she eyed the man who cowered before the revolvers she had snatched from the ground the moment they caught her eye. "The man who killed Big Jehu forgot to take his weapons, or purposely left them for me. If you move forward a step, I will touch the triggers!"

The suddenness of the change in his fortunes seemed to have paralyzed the Mormon spider, but he soon found his oily tongue.

"You don't evince much gratitude, girl," he said. "Only a little while ago I saved your life at the risk of my own, and now you threaten to shoot me."

"I have already thanked you for your services," replied the girl, "but I am not going to Salt Lake City just now. Better insult at Deadwood than a Mormon slave in Utah."

"That's the natural outgrowth of the insane Deadwood doctrine of 'No Mormon need apply,'" smiled Timothy. "If you will lower those steel bull-dogs, and let me convince you—"

"I have heard enough!" interrupted Alice. "You will have to continue your journey alone, unless you want to follow me, and that might not be safe since I am going north."

"Not back to Deadwood?" almost gasped the Mormon.

"To the north at any rate and alone."

"On foot?"

"Not if the horse I see yonder will convey me."

Timothy Tenwives saw that the steed whose fright had spoiled his well-laid plans had returned to the spot, and from a short distance beyond the girl was quietly looking on.

"Retreat to the right hand side of the trail and let me pass," resumed the girl.

"Look hyer, Alice—"

"Obey me, sir! An hour ago you had your way; now I am going to have mine."

The determination that lit up the girl's eyes was quite enough for the sneaking representative of Mormonism, and, menaced by the deadly revolvers, he obeyed the command.

Alice advanced up the trail with a steady step and eyes still fixed on the Mormon.

The horse awaited her with his fright considerably abated, and an ejaculation of joy fell from her lips when she dropped one of the pistols and clutched the rein.

Timothy Tenwives saw her vault with grace into the saddle, and inwardly cursed the ill-fortune that had despoiled him of a prisoner if not a wife.

"I'll conquer yet!" he cried dashing forward and shaking his fist at Alice. "You may go to Deadwood, but I'll get thar; you may travel northward to the red tribes along the British line, but Timothy Tenwives has sworn to make you the eleventh member of his family, and he will keep his oath."

The Deadwood belle sent a defiant laugh over her shoulder toward the enraged Mormon and then bade him an adieu, the sarcasm of which cut him to the quick.

A moment later he stood in the trail loudly cursing his ill-luck, while the bird which had escaped the snare of the fowler was disappearing as rapidly as the horse could hear her away.

The Mormon could scarcely credit his bad luck.

A few minutes ago he had Alice in his power and was on the way to Salt Lake City; now the tables were turned, and he was where he had been the day before in fortunes.

Timothy was willing to subscribe to the truth of the old adage: "There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip."

Alice had really left him, and he could not hope to overtake her situated as he was without a horse and forced to proceed on foot.

A bend in the trail hid the mad Mormon from the girl's observation; she could not see his disappointed expression nor hear the maledictions that broke over his lips.

She reined in the horse after awhile and allowed him to proceed in a steadier gait.

The Denver trail was well defined, and Alice knew that she had but to follow it to reach Deadwood.

And why go back there?

Why not go on to Denver where she would not see Paradise Paul, nor be watched by the lynx eyes of the thirty toughs?

In Denver she would be safe, while in Deadwood perils greater than those already sustained might environ her.

Alice, gentle reader, had reasons for going back to the wild capital of the Black Hills.

She had left there one in whom she felt interested, and that person was not Paradise Paul.

She believed that Broadcloth Burt, the Denverite, had come to Deadwood for a certain purpose and that that purpose concerned her.

Therefore, she would go back to the place and face events.

Paradise Paul was there, the man from Iron-Grip was not far off, and all hated Broadcloth Burt; but she felt that instead of flying to Denver to find an asylum among strangers, her place was in Deadwood, dangerous as it was.

Colonel Sandbanks might have continued his flight after losing her, or he might have gone back to Deadwood; Alice did not care what course he had pursued, as she did not fear the proprietor of the Setemup, now, though she knew it not, a mass of ruins.

No incident of an alarming or suspicious nature prevented her return to Deadwood; she found the trail singularly unobstructed, and she drew rein among the outskirts of the wildcat city.

It was the morning that followed the eventful and tragic night whose deeds we have witnessed in previous chapters.

Broadcloth Burt had been discovered in the upper room of the Setemup, had shot Bowie Bluff from the window, and the early dawn had followed with Simon Sandbanks's return as Colorado's prisoner, and the mad assault on Paradise Paul weak in his shanty.

All these were thrilling scenes and rendered the time not very propitious for the girl's coming.

The sun had left his bed behind the hills and was marching zenithward when Alice reached Deadwood.

"I might as well face him first as last," she said to herself. "My return will surprise him, and if he growls I will tell him plainly that while I thank him for kindness in the past, from this time on, I am my own mistress. No more your ward, Paradise Paul! And you, thirty toughs, I am not going to be too closely watched."

She urged the horse forward again, and three minutes later appeared like a vision from the sky to a group of Deadwood characters who stood in front of the Full-Hand Casino.

Several exclamations of astonishment hailed her appearance, but she gave the crowd no more than a passing glance and rode on.

"Stop her! she mustn't go on to the cap'n's shanty!" exclaimed one of the group who guessed the girl's destination. "Hello! thar, girl!" he called, lifting his voice. "Stop whar ye ar fer the present. Paradise isn't in a condition to see you just now an'—"

"I will be judge of that, Colorado Clate," interrupted Alice.

"You hev'n't any right ter be. Ther cap'n can't be seen now."

"Why not?"

Alice had reined in her steed, and was looking down upon the stalwart tough who was coming forward with great strides.

"Because—because he can't—thet's all," was the answer. "We ar' surprised ter see ye back, but we'll make it just ez pleasant fer ye ez it used ter be, only ye can't see Paradise just now. He's bed a relapse since daylight. In the first place, he lost blood with his hand, but his iron constitution kept him up till the excitement dropped then down he went. He war gittin' along pretty well until fortune brought ther meanest skunk in Deadwood home, an' he choked the cap'n till he hadn't three breaths ter draw from."

The girl felt her heart rise into her throat as she longed for Colorado to explain.

Who had choked Paradise Paul?

She knew of but one man who despised him enough to do that—Broadcloth Burt, from Denver.

Colorado Clate stood beside the girl's horse with twenty men and more looking on from a distance.

"What became of the man who choked the captain?" she inquired, a question she could not keep back.

"The meanest hypocrite next ter ther Mormon spider thet ever struck Deadwood, he war! What did we do with him? He's lyin' in the pit under Monte Mark's house waitin' till 'ap'n Paul gits strong enough to blow his brain-box to pieces."

"Broadcloth Burt?" ejaculated Alice.

"Heavens! no. I'm talkin' about Simon Sandbanks. The boys wanted ter throw him among the burnin' logs ov his hotel, but we overruled their motion. As fer thet dangerous Denverite, arter shootin' the Bad Man from Iron-Grip through the back, blame me! ef he didn't face twenty pards an' walk coolly away in broad daylight."

Alice's countenance brightened in an instant. "Thank fortune!" she exclaimed. "The kid gloves will win in the end. Broadcloth Burt is more than a match for the thirty toughs of Deadwood."

For a solid minute the man on the ground stared up into her face amazed.

"We'll see," he said. "We all know just what brought that shootin' fashion-plate from ther South, an' we ar' goin' ter show him thet one revolver hezn't ther ghost of a show among sixty."

Alice started.

"What brought him to Deadwood?" she asked.

"It wouldn't do ter tell you just now. One ov these days mebbe you'll find out—thet is, ef we don't cash ther Denverite's checks ag'in' his will an' quicker'n lightning. No, my daisy girl; it wouldn't do ter give it away."

"Very well. I will make the captain tell me. He knows."

"Ov course he knows; but don't go to him now. Arter awhile nobody will object, but let him rekiver a little," and the bronzed hand of Colorado Clate fell on Alice's bridle-rein, and he led the horse away.

CHAPTER XXV.

CORNERED.

Of course, after what had already taken place in Deadwood, Alice's return was sure to create a fair-sized sensation, and it became the topic of conversation at the Full-Hand and other like places of resort.

The girl submitted without remonstrance to being led away with Colorado's hand at the bridle-rein, and she soon found herself installed in a rough weather-boarded shanty belonging to Idaho Hal, who but a short time before had lost his life, as we have seen, in an attempt to overtake Big Jehu's stage.

While she was not regarded as a prisoner, it was evident that she was watched in order to prevent her from making her way to Paradise Paul's cabin.

Colorado had told her that the captain of the toughs had been choked to death's verge by Simon Sandbanks, and that Broadcloth Burt, the Denverite, had effected his escape in the face of the assembled rascals of the town.

The day passed slowly to the girl, and she looked forward to the coming of night with a great deal of eagerness and anxiety.

A good sound sleep strengthened her, and she awoke to see the sun sinking once more behind the silver hills of the west.

Up to this time she had not been disturbed by the citizens of Deadwood; she had found two substantial meals in the shanty's larder, and watched the sun disappear from the little window beside the door.

Despite the apparent liberty she enjoyed, Alice felt herself a prisoner; she knew that the cabin had been watched from the moment of her entrance into it, and that the eyes of some of Deadwood's roughs were still upon it.

Slowly another night, star-illuminated and not dark, fell over the mining-town, and the girl was still in the quarters she had occupied all day.

Was it to continue thus?

"What of Paradise Paul, and why don't they

tell me whether I cannot go to him now?" she asked herself. "I never thought that Colonel Sandbanks would display courage enough to attack anybody—not even a one-armed man. I begin to believe that Paradise Paul is not in bad health, considering, and that Colorado's words cover a scheme of some kind. Night is here again, and they do not visit me; but I am watched, I know."

Yes, watched she was, but not by the eyes she imagined.

"I will try them," she went on. "I will try to reach my old cabin to learn what has happened there. If they prevent me, then I will know that Colorado has lied, and that the choking story is a hoax."

She opened the door slightly with the last word and looked out.

Not a sound disturbed the quietude that reigned in Deadwood, and a stranger would never have supposed that the deadly revolver had cracked in its streets, and that men had fallen dead on every hand.

"My lambs are not asleep," said Alice, noting the singular silence with a smile. "It is too early for the monte-tables to begin operations, but the toughs are not idle. They are doing something."

The Deadwood belle stood for several moments in the doorway, as if charmed by the stillness of the hour and the beauty of the starlit night.

"Now for the trail. If I fail, why—I'll fail, that's all!"

She stepped out, but the foremost foot had hardly touched the ground when she became conscious that somebody was very near, and the next moment a hand fell upon her wrist.

"Don't start, girl," spoke a voice in low, reassuring tones as Alice recoiled with her eyes fixed upon the tall figure that bugged the darkened weather-boarding of the shanty while she was held a prisoner. "I guess you needn't be afraid of me."

Then it was that the tough's ward recognized him.

"Is it you—Broadcloth Burt?" parted her lips.

"It's nobody else. Hush! do not betray me in a loud voice. I have eluded the lynx-eyed pards of Deadwood. They didn't get entirely rid of me when I backed out of town behind my repeaters this morning. They are fools if they think that Denver has yielded to Deadwood!"

The words sent a thrill to the girl's heart, and a flash of pride and exultation lit up her eyes as she looked up into the Denverite's face.

"Go back into the cabin. I want to talk," he continued before she could answer one of his rapidly-spoken sentences, and he forced her back over the threshold and cleared it after her with one stride.

"You've been away?" he went on half-interrogatively.

"Yes."

"The colonel didn't abduct you?"

"No. I fell into the hands first of Maud the Merciless, then into the power of the Mormon spider."

Broadcloth Burt seemed to receive the girl's reference to Timothy Tenwives with a start.

"Where did you leave that oily hypocrite?" he asked.

"Half-way down the grade on the Denver trail."

"Dead?"

"No."

"I am half-sorry, but Maud will settle with him if she gets a chance."

"I hope she will."

"She has a right to, and she will not hesitate. But do you know what has happened here since you went away?"

"I know nothing only what Colorado Clate saw fit to tell, and that was that you made your escape, and that Colonel Sandbanks attacked Paradise Paul and choked him to death's door."

A grim smile played with the corners of the Denver dandy's mouth.

"Choked him? I should say he did. I never want that old Californian to bury his fingers in my throat. If Bowie Bluff hadn't ferreted me out in the Setemup, and then betrayed me, I should have witnessed the whole scene. Yes, Alice, I want to talk."

"Go on," said the girl, eagerly, as the Denverite paused.

"I would show you a letter, if we dared to have a light hyer," he said, "but as that would not be policy, I will try to repeat it to you."

"I am listening!" cried the girl. "Do not miss a word of it, for I am sure that it concerns me. Now, proceed."

Broadcloth Burt was silent for a moment, and then Alice heard him, in slow and measured tones:

"For the sake of Heaven do not fail. My child is my life. Restore her to my arms before I die—I who have suffered so long without her. I cannot think of being mistaken. She must be my child. They lie who tell her that I am dead. Fail me not, my friend. Bring me the child for whom I constantly yearn, and Heaven will reward you. I cannot. I wait for her. I pray for your success."

In the intense stillness that succeeded the Denverite's concluding sentence 'he fall of a pin might have been heard.

Alice felt the contact of his hand and heard her heart throb.

"What do you think of it, girl? I have repeated all that *she* wrote," the sport said.

"And she is my mother!" burst from the girl's throat. "Oh, Heaven! how men will lie. I have been told all along that she was dead. Is it not true, Broadcloth Burt? Were not those words from my mother?"

"Yes, Alice, from your mother."

Paradise Paul's ward clasped her hands and uttered an exclamation of joy.

"And she is waiting for me?" she cried.

"I left her in Denver."

"So near! Then let it be farewell to Deadwood. Come, Broadcloth Burt. You are not the villain Paradise Paul calls you; you have come from my mother. I want to know no more. She shall wait for me no longer."

The fair creature seemed carried away by enthusiasm, and started toward the door, but the quick hand of the Denverite detained her.

"If I am here for the purpose of restoring you to your mother, I am not going to spoil matters with haste," he said, calmly. "You must not lose your head for joy."

"I will not. I will be calm. I am calm now."

The sudden change in Alice's voice seemed to confirm her last sentence, and she stepped back from the door and stood at the sport's bidding.

"I don't like to steal you from Deadwood," he said looking down into the girl's upturned face. "These men-tigers and Paradise Paul hate me so that I'd like to show them that Broadcloth Burt is no coward—that Denver shuns not the revolvers of Deadwood. Paradise Paul has said that between us it should be war to the knife and the knife to the hilt, and by heavens! I would like to prove it somehow."

He hissed the last words from behind set teeth and Alice saw his eyes snap.

"I am ready to leave Deadwood in any manner and at any time you choose," she said. "I have not come back defenseless. A dead man on the Denver trail left me his six-shooters. Say the word and we will not quit Deadwood like thieves in the pight, but boldly, and in the teeth of the thirty toughs!"

"I am not here to get you into danger; my last commands were about your safety. No, Alice, you must not go from Deadwood amid the cracks of revolvers. I will beat my desires down and we will leave the place peacefully, but not in a cowardly manner. Let them interfere, though, and the war-knife shall be buried to the hilt at once. Get ready, girl. Within an hour."

"Ready! Cover the shanty door thar!" sung out a loud voice in tones of doom. "We've got the Denver fraud in a box this time! Broadcloth Burt, the shanty is surrounded by the thirty toughs of Deadwood. Come forth an' die like a man if ye dare!"

In the cabin two revolvers clicked.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE HANDLESS DEAD.

"My God!" almost gasped Alice as the fierce words died away. "We have deferred the moment of flight too long, and the eagles of Deadwood have swooped upon us."

"They are bound to force the war to the knife," said the Denverite. "I am ready for the contest."

"Against those thirty men?"

"Yes, against them all! I have discarded my gloves. Henceforward I operate in Deadwood with bare hands."

He had barely uttered the last word when the voice outside sounded again:

"We mean bizness, Denver, an' we can't stand hyer all night waitin' on yer pleasure. Come forth an' die like a man, Broadcloth. We've got ther drop on yer, ef you ar' behind a shanty door."

"It is Colorado who speaks," whispered Alice. "He is in command of the toughs at present. They will obey him as implicitly as they do Paradise Paul."

"Let them obey him. I may command in Deadwood when this game is played to the close. They want me out there."

He moved toward the door, but the hands of the Deadwood flower encircled his arm and stopped him.

"Let me go," she said. "They dare not shoot me. Let me try the effects of a parley."

"With the Deadwood skunks?—never!" and he shook the girl's grip loose.

The next moment, with the courage of a lion, he reached the door, threw it wide, and stepped out with a revolver in each hand.

His sudden appearance in the brilliant starlight made the stalwart figures before the shanty recoil an inch.

"Whar's your captain?" he asked.

"I'm hyer in his place," answered one of the figures at whose shoulder was a cocked Winchester. "I am Colorado Clate, for the present in command of Deadwood. Hands up, Broadcloth! The shanty is completely surrounded, an' ther boys ar' riled."

It was a momentous time.

The man from Denver had seen at a single look that he was covered by at least five repeating rifles, and double that number of revolvers.

If the toughs of Deadwood were as hardened as those of Denver, they would not hesitate to riddle him with bullets.

"Kid gloves can't win hyer!" continued Colorado Clate in derisive tones. "We've got no use for 'em in Deadwood, an' then we hate everything thet comes up from Denver anyhow, an' you hail from thet snide town. Please elevate yer grappers, Broadcloth Burt."

"For those villains?" said the Denverite under his breath. "I can kill here or spare, just as I like. Alice is behind me, and a mother made me swear that I would bring the lost child home."

In an instant, as it were, he seemed to have altered his resolution.

When he stepped from the cabin and faced the Deadwood toughs it was with a mad intention of pitting himself and his deadly revolvers against the whole lot, but the girl in the shanty and his solemn oath had conquered.

All of a sudden up went his hands.

"Thet shows a grain ov sense," said Colorado noticing the action. "Advance ten steps straight toward me, Broadcloth. No stratagem. Ther fingers at ther triggers before you hev killed time an' ag'in."

More like a victor than a captive the man from Deadwood walked toward the captain of the toughs, with his hands—empty now, he having returned his revolvers to his belt—above his sombrero.

"Halt!"

Broadcloth Burt stood still, but his quick eye saw several figures glide between him and the cabin and he knew that he was completely surrounded.

"We don't take you to the Casino for a treat this time," said Colorado with a grin. "Some ov the boys tried that once afore, an' suthin' interfered ter spoil ther subsequent proceedin's."

"I believe something did occur then."

The coolness and suavity of the Denverite was galling.

"We go straight to the captain now," continued Colorado. "Your fate hangs on his tongue. We all know what fetched you to Deadwood, an' Deadwood holds her own ag'in the world!"

"If he goes to Paradise Paul's I go, too," said a voice in a different key, and a young girl bounded from the cabin and landed at the Denverite's side so suddenly that the toughs started amazed.

"Suit yerself about thet, girl," said Colorado Clate. "You'll be safer thar in a certain sense than hyer; but blast my fortunes! ef you hev'n't picked out a pard at a mighty onsart'in time."

"I have chosen a friend and I mean to stand by him!" answered Alice with flashing eyes.

Broadcloth Burt now stood in the midst of all the men who with the stealth of panthers had surrounded the cabin.

Without a single exception they were bronzed giants who thirsted like tigers for his blood, and not a friendly glance shot from their eyes.

"To ther cap'n!" commanded Colorado Clate.

"He's weak, but he kin talk. Broadcloth, he bade us save ther hash-mixer what choked 'im till he got stronger, but my opinion is that he'll not be thet easy with you."

"I'll give up the stake when it's squarely won," said the Denver dandy coolly, and with a swift glance at the girl at his side.

"I hev'n't seen your cap'n for some hours—not since he said that twixt him and me it should be war ter the knife."

"Thet's what it is," and Colorado Clate placed himself at the Denverite's side as the band moved off with the handsome captive in the center.

The distance from the scene of the capture to Paradise Paul's cabin was not great; it led past the still smoking ruins of the Setemup Hotel which had been fired by the band of some enraged tough, and Broadcloth Burt threw a look toward the scene of desolation as he came up.

"From ther window ov ther colonel's hotel you dropped Bowie Bluff," said Colorado, looking into the sport's face.

"Yes. He found me thar an' then betrayed me. I hate a traitor!"

"It war ther deendest shot ever given in Deadwood. The man from Iron-Grip never kicked."

A faint smile of satisfaction appeared on Broadcloth's face and he turned away.

Colorado Clate continued to regard the man with more than passing interest.

There was something in his personal appearance striking enough to command the attention even of a desperado.

He did not look like a rough, although his quickness with the trigger, and the eyes that beamed in his head, told that he was when aroused a bad man to deal with.

His stay in Deadwood, his frequent desertions of the place, and his movements everywhere had not in the least soiled his clothes.

There was dust on the coarse garments of the Deadwood toughs, dust in their beards and eye-

brows, but not a particle adhered to the dandy's garments, and his mustache was still waxed as when he first reached Deadwood.

His only change had been in the removal of his kids, as if, as he had said, he intended to fight the remainder of the game through with bare hands.

"Too nice ter be soiled," Colorado had remarked under his breath, after a close study of his prisoner. "Dirt an' him ar' sworn foes; but, in spite ov it all, dust'll claim him arter to-night."

The conduct to the shanty inhabited by the leader of the toughs was devoid of any enlivening incidents, and when Colorado Clate called a halt, the man from Denver looked ahead and saw the apparition of a cabin.

Alice sprang immediately to his side.

"We are here," she said, in the lowest of whispers. "This is my old home. For Heaven's sake, don't stir up the wounded lion inside!"

Broadcloth Burt gave her a glance, which did not reassure the girl, and then turned his attention to the man who had stepped to the door.

The portals of the Deadwood shanty stood slightly ajar, and all caught beyond it the faintest glimmer of a light.

Not a sound came from the inside.

Broadcloth Burt and Alice saw Colorado open the door a little more, and put his head inside; the next minute his body crossed the threshold.

All outside waited for his reappearance.

Thirty seconds had not elapsed ere the form of Colorado was again visible, and all at once a terrible announcement fell from his lips.

"Great God, boys, ther cap'n's dead!"

There were twenty exclamations of incredulity and an instant rush for the cabin.

"Come in an' see fer yerselves, but bring the prisoner along," said Colorado. "Dead ez a smelt he is, an' he's been thet way some time!"

Need we say that the famous Deadwood shanty was soon filled with a mass of mad humanity that stared at the figure on the floor, over whose ghastly face Colorado Clate held the candle he had snatched from the table?

"Thar's yer cap'n!" hissed the head of the gang. "Ther loss ov his hand war too much. An' then thet infernal chokin'—thet didn't help ther case."

"No! We kin pull up ther choker fer it, but thet won't restore Paradise Paul."

"Thet's a fact; it won't bring ther cap'n back, but it'll cool our blood. Kernul Sandbanks is in the pit under Monte Mark's shanty. He helped send Cap'n Paul across ther river. We kin send him thar, too. Ther kernul shall hang!"

This decision was assented to with deep-seated curses, and the crowd moved toward the door.

"Don't forget the prisoner you have now in hand," continued Colorado. "We brought him hyer for sentence, but Cap'n Paul's beyond thet now. I'll kiver ther cap'n up while yer deliberate. Remember what brought Broadcloth Burt from Denver, an' don't forget thet ther death ov Cap'n Paul makes Alice ther ward ov Deadwood!"

Colorado turned from the hard crowd and stooped over the stiffened figure of his leader.

All at once he sprang erect with a cry that echoed in every corner of the cabin.

"Ther Mormon tigress hez been hyer!" he exclaimed. "Ther cap'n hezn't a hand ter his name!"

Colorado Clate proved his terrible words by the handless wrists which he held up to the gaze of all!

"She warn't satisfied till she took ther other hand," he went on. "Who shall say thet she sha'n't be hunted from trail ter trail? Ther lies ther grittiest pard, boys, thet ever dropped his enemy. Deadwood never saw such a cap'n, an' thar never kin be another Paradise Paul!"

The men were speechless: horror, revenge, and madness combined to close their lips.

"To the kernul, anyhow!" suddenly shouted one. "We kin pay him for the chokin'!"

"To the kernul! to Monte Mark's!"

The excited crowd surged toward the door, but with a bound Colorado Clate reached the threshold first.

"Deal with the man you have before you!" he cried. "If you intend ter let him loose, do it now."

"Yes, since that man is dead and I am no one's ward, let this man do his sworn duty without molestation," said Alice as her hand fell on the Denver Dandy's arm.

"No one's ward? We shall show you, girl! You belong ter Deadwood, an' no man takes you away without the consent ov ther Thirty Pards!"

The girl's heart seemed to sink within her, but the Denverite appeared to increase an inch in stature.

"If you want to keep that woman in Deadwood make sure of it now!" he cried, striding boldly toward the man at the door. "I am here for her. I've lost my gloves, and look into this, Colorado Clate!"

He struck down the arm of Colorado as he thundered out the last sentence, and the horrified mob saw his revolver pressed against their new leader's temples.

The Denverite was as agile as a tiger.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW THE AVENGER CAME.

IF the reader does not object, we will turn from this scene for a little while to witness another equally as thrilling, although it takes us back a step in our romance.

Half-asleep on the sorry cot on the floor of his cabin, while Broadcloth Burt was creeping down the darkened streets of Deadwood to an interview with Alice which might yet cost him his life, lay Paradise Paul.

He had not recovered from the terrible choking received at the hands of Simon Sandbanks, which, added to the loss of blood already sustained, had brought his strength down to that of a child's.

Night had fallen again over the Black Hills capital, and at his own request the captain of the toughs had been left alone.

He saw not the stealthy figure that crept into Deadwood from the Denver trail, nor did his acute senses catch the tread of the approaching one.

It was not until the door of his cabin, never locked, and ready to answer to the push of all, opened slowly, that he knew that he was to have a visitor—and the most terrible one that had ever crossed his threshold.

The last friends who left him had put a revolver within the reach of his remaining hand, and toward the weapon his fingers glided as the shadow of the stealthy visitor fell athwart his cot.

But he was not quick enough now, though there had been a time when no one, however alert, could steal a march on the prince of Northwestern toughs.

The new-comer swooped suddenly upon Paradise Paul, and four long fingers closed on his wrist just as they touched the ready weapon.

"I am here for the everlasting settlement!" hissed Captain Paul's visitor, and a pair of eyes darted downward a flash that seemed to burn his pallid cheek. "I am here for the other hand! The wiles of men and the craft of the Mormon spider have failed to keep me from revenge. I had your ward again, but this time the Salt Lake City viper rescued her. He took her toward Denver, and I will follow him when I have settled with you."

Even before the speaker opened her mouth Paradise Paul had recognized her.

Her fingers seemed to cut through his wrist to the bone; her eyes were living coals of rage.

"What do you say? Have you no words for me?"

"None for you!" was the defiant answer, as the teeth of the Deadwood desperado closed behind the last word. "I turned you out of this cabin once. I would do it again."

"You would believe the Mormon's lie again, would you?"

"Yes."

"Then you never loved the woman you made your wife?"

"I never did."

"Merciful Father! hear him!" gasped Merciless Maud. "Then, in the name of Heaven, Captain Paul, why did you wed me?"

A faint smile came to the desperado's lips and a triumphant light lit up his eyes.

"I did it to beat the man who did love you," he said, while the smile continued visible.

"My God! I never dreamed of this heartlessness. And having beaten him as you term it, you provoked a quarrel and shot him?"

"That belongs ter ther annals ov Cl'ar-Grit camp."

Maud was silent for a moment.

"That adds another weight to my wrongs," she said. "You wanted a pretext, then, to turn me from your door; you were more than ready to listen to the lie that originated in Timothy Tenwives's heart, that he might make me his Mormon wife."

"The old fellow did me a service then."

"Weren't you in league with him?" asked the avenger quickly.

"Me go in with a Mormon villain? No! I never got down ter that level, Maud!" said Captain Paul, indignantly.

"Not to his level," she smiled, sarcastically. "God knows you have sunk below it. But my time has come! The wrath of years is about to fall upon the heads of two men—the one who pushed me from him one winter night into the loathsome arms of the other! I am here for the hand that sent me adrift!"

Captain Paul was at the mercy of the woman whose life he had blighted; he could only gaze up into her merciless eyes and feel the burning fingers of revenge at his wrist.

"I will become Alice's guardian," she suddenly went on. "I want somebody to love when I have taken vengeance. I believe I could love that girl."

"You love Alice?"

"I will try."

"I pity the poor creature, then," said the

desperado. "But you will have to play a deep game if you get her."

"From that Mormon wretch?"

"He is no fool."

"I know him. With me on his trail Salt Lake City will never hide him!" cried the avenger. "He may take Alice to his house; I will enter it. Bolts and bars shall never keep me out. I will get the girl and stir the Mormon capital to its depths with a tragedy that shall make the chief wretch of all—Brigham Young—tremble in his security. You shall never see my triumph; you, Captain Paul, will be handless and dead when your desperadoes gather for orders."

"We will see!" and Paradise Paul made a futile effort to withdraw his hand from the woman's grasp.

"I will free your hand in a minute!" she hissed. "Captain Paul, the hour of vengeance waited for so long is here!"

Quick as the spring of the mountain-cat, the hands of Merciless Maud darted at the villain's throat, still sore from Simon Sandbanks's terrible clutch.

With but one arm left for defense, the Deadwooder could not prevent the attack, and the fingers of the wronged woman found his trachea.

Her eyes seemed to shoot forth sparks of madness as she threw the weight of her body into the assault; the once giant in strength struggled, but for what?

The theft of the left hand and the landlord's attack had paved the way to the avenger's success.

She seemed insane, for, in her fury, her fingers almost met behind the desperado's windpipe, as if the remembrance of her past rendered her hatred ungovernable.

Captain Paul's eyes appeared ready to fly from his head; his face, at first colorless, reddened and then grew dark.

The Mormon Exile had become a demon incarnate; she had come to kill, to avenge, and she did both.

When she left her victim lying in the poor beams of the dying candle on the table all was silent in the shanty, and under the table, pulseless and bloody, lay a human hand, six feet from the bleeding wrist at the dead man's side.

Just beyond the cabin door Merciless Maud halted in the starlight and threw one hand solemnly toward heaven.

"One," she said, in thrilling tones. "Half of my vow has been fulfilled. There yet remains another—the Mormon spider who lied me from the bondage of one house to the tortures of another. I am merciless, but those two men have made me so. In the future, if Thou forgivest me, Heaven, I will be a woman, but never again a wife, once more!"

She strode from the cabin and vanished amid the gloom of Deadwood's streets.

Like a tigress, stealthily and noiselessly, she had glided to her work, and like one she went away.

And Paradise Paul, dead in his cabin and mutilated, waited for the coming of the desperate men whose leader he had been through years of wickedness.

Deadwood had lost a "prominent citizen," but one whom she could very well spare.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COLORADO'S CATCH.

LIFE appeared a brittle thread to Colorado Clate when he found himself looking into the muzzle of Broadcloth Burt's revolver.

True it was that a score of the toughs of Deadwood stood within a few feet of him, and with revolvers in their hands, but he knew that the lifting of a single one would seal his own doom.

"I am here for the girl—for Alice, I tell you, and if you want to keep her in Deadwood, you must do it now," continued the man from Denver, breaking the silence that had followed his coup. "I seek the life of no man, but I am prepared to handle those who don't like me without gloves. Gentlemen," he glanced swiftly at the horrified crowd, "I hold at Colorado's head my passport from Deadwood, also the passport of this woman at my side."

"Take her, then, an' be hanged ter yer!" growled Colorado. "Take her ter Denver ef yer kin git her thar."

"I am to be hunted, then?"

"Who said so?"

"You, by implication."

Colorado smiled.

"Take her ter Denver; that's what I said. Stand back, boys, an' let 'em out."

Quite unexpectedly the Denverite's revolver dropped from a level with Colorado's head, and he looked down at Alice.

"We'll go, girl," he said, and then his eyes glanced at the toughs again.

"The handless man, in the last interview I had with him, said that twixt we two it should be war to the knife. He said so, not I, understand."

"We understand you," grated the new leader. "Thar's ther door. Take yer pard an' skip."

A quiet smile that breathed of contempt and

defiance toyed with the dandy's lips as he stepped quickly to the door, preceded by Alice.

A moment later the pair stood in the starlight, while the baffled tigers of Deadwood, beaten for the third time by their Denver rival, stood amazed in the presence of the dead.

"It's no harm to shoot a man like that in the back!" suddenly exclaimed Colorado. "A deeper-dyed villain than Broadcloth Burt never struck Deadwood. That girl doesn't leave town with him! She belongs ter Deadwood, because she war Cap'n Paul's ward. We ar' her protectors from this time on. She sha'n't see Denver in Broadcloth's company."

There was a shout of approval from every tongue in the house save two, and Colorado Clate turned madly toward the door.

"Stay back!" he suddenly said to the crowd that surged after him. "I am a match for that fashion-plate, if he is armed to the teeth. Fix ther cap'n up fer ther grave, an' swear over ther corpse ter git even with Maud ther Merciless fer her work. I will find Broadcloth Burt an' Alice. They won't leave Deadwood to-night; ther one with ther boots on stays hyar forever!"

Colorado Clate stepped from the shanty before any one of the Deadwood pards could detain him.

"He had me a minute ago an' he wouldn't use his advantage—ther fool!" he ejaculated. "Now let him eat ther consequences with ther bread ov eternal bitterness. Broadcloth Burt, when you left Denver ter rake in ther Deadwood queen, you sealed yer doom!"

He, too, was in the starlight now, but not a glimpse of the two companions rewarded his keen eyes.

"Paradise dead! an' me captain of the Deadwood toughs!" he continued. "Naturally, the girl falls from his hands inter mine. While he lived no man in Deadwood had a show for her, now the man what wins her an' keeps her ag'in' odds will get a dandy wife. She never hated me, that girl didn't; but she told me once thet I had no business ter b'long to ther Thirty. She never loved me, though, but thet's no sign thet she never would." And Colorado smiled. "A bold strike will win the prize. A bullet through the Denver dandy's head will keep Alice hyar, an' thet means a game for me."

Away he went toward the southern part of the town through which ran the Denver trail.

He walked rapidly, but his feet gave out no sound; he seemed to believe that he could overtake Broadcloth Burt and Alice, who he took for granted had already left Deadwood.

All at once while yet among the small shanties of the silver-miners Colorado halted suddenly, and then stepped quickly into the shadow of one of the butes.

A motionless figure a few feet ahead had startled him and now he watched it with eager eyes and a finger at the trigger of a heavy revolver.

"If I hev found him already I am lucky," he said to himself. "I have said, Broadcloth, thet you shouldn't leave Deadwood, an' I guess I'm goin' ter keep my word. Move a step, show yerself, give me a better chance for a dead-drop, an' then—good-by, my Denver night-hawk!"

Colorado Clate had caught sight of the figure so suddenly that he had been almost lifted from his feet, and now he held his breath while he regarded the person who leaned against the next cabin and in a poor position to afford him a good shot.

"It is Broadcloth, but what is he standin' thar for? Has he lost the girl already? She wasn't averse ter goin' with him, but they're not together now. Hello! I'll get a chance ter bounce him now!"

The man against the shanty had moved and that toward Colorado Clate!

Slowly the villain's revolver crept upward until it covered the advancing figure.

"Goin' ter Denver, eh?" chuckled the Deadwooder. "When you git thar, Broadcloth, just drop Deadwood a line."

Scarcely five feet separated the two men now.

Colorado Clate eager to blow the sport's head to pieces leaned forward with the ready weapon.

Suddenly a change came over his countenance and his tiger orbs changed from rage to blank astonishment.

"Great heavens! has ther dead come back!" he gasped.

"The man in the narrow street heard these words and stopped."

"I wasn't expectin' you, but I'll take you a the same," blurted the captain of the toughs covering the distance between him and the man with a single stride. "Don't you know that for you Utah's a blamed sight safer than Deadwood?"

There was no reply for the listener had recoiled a foot to be followed by the blazing eyes, and the menacing revolver of Colorado Clate.

"No squealin'. I've got the drop on yer, Timothy. Twice run from Deadwood when you ought ter hev been shot in your tracks, you still persist in comin' back. Under what star war ye born any how?"

"Under a very unlucky one, I judge," was

the reply of the horrified Mormon, for the man so suddenly surprised by Colorado was our old acquaintance from Salt Lake City, and not the man from Denver.

"A man who won't take the hints you've had must be a born fool," continued the Deadwooder. "Thar ain't a safe spot for you within ther limits ov this town, an' yet you will come back."

"I am here to harm no one."

"Oh no; you wouldn't blast anybody's reputation, my meek gazelle," sneered Colorado. "All your thoughts are for the happiness ov mankind. As one ov ther Mountain Meadows angels, Deadwood loves ye, an' ef ye stay hyer they'll give ye an ovation. Nol you don't want ter drag ther angel ov this town to yer slave-pen in Utah! Oh, no; you wouldn't make my ward unhappy!"

"Your ward?" echoed the Mormon spider.

"You are not Cap'n Paul?"

"Not quite. Cap'n Paul is dead an' his property has descended to me."

"Dead!"

"Dead ez a smelt. Killed!—choked ter death by the same merciless woman who will one day git away with you."

"My God! Is that she devil at large again?"

"She visited Deadwood to-night anyhow."

A terrified look filled the Mormon's eyes.

"The next time I strike I'll make sure work ov her!" he grated, clinching his hands. "Where is she now?"

"I can't answer that question, I only know thet when she went from ther cap'n's cabin ther cap'n war dead! She doesn't like you any more than she did Cap'n Paul, I b'lieve."

"Great beavens! I should say she doesn't. I didn't come back to Deadwood to encounter her."

"I suspect not. Warn't you on ther road ter Salt Lake City when you got it inter yer head ter come back?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you go on?"

Timothy Tenwives looked into the eyes of the stern-faced Deadwooder and was silent.

"You needn't answer me," said Colorado.

"You haven't given up the girl."

"If Paradise Paul is dead, an' I can win her by fair means, who will object?" he asked, his countenance suddenly brightening.

"I will, with all Deadwood at my back!" was the quick response.

"You came hyar ter run Alice off in ther teeth ov ther thirty toughs. You ar' a fool ef you think thet ther cap'n's death gives you a right ter ther girl. But I'm goin' ter be clever toward ye, Timothy. I'm goin' ter preserve ye forever from ther wiles of Maud, the Merciless; but in ther first place answer me three questions."

"I'll do it!" cried the Mormon eagerly.

"In ther first place, when did you reach Deadwood?"

"About ten minutes before you halted me."

"Did you come in over the Denver trail?"

"Yes."

"And met nobody?"

"Not a soul!"

Colorado Clate looked puzzled, but took care not to reveal his thoughts to the Mormon apostle.

"Are my replies satisfactory?" asked the wife-hunter.

"Yes. Now I will keep my word. I will save you forever from ther clutches of Merciless Maud. Come back inter town with me. It is yer only hope. She bez got even with Paradise Paul, an' if we don't interfere now, she'll get her work in on you. You don't want ter die, Timothy?"

"Not by any means, and of course not by the hands of that infernal woman."

"You want ter go back ter Utah an' die in ther arms of yer lovin' family, don't yer?" grinned the tough.

"That's my desire," said the hypocrite.

"Ther end ov ther good man is peace an' that's what yer end ought ter be," continued Colorado. "I don't b'lieve one-half ther slanderous tales they've started on ye. I don't b'lieve thet war ther cause ov Maud leavin' Paul, her husband, fer a man ov honor like yerself would never do anything mean ter get a wife! Thet's why we're goin' ter save you forever from ther clutches ov thet mistaken woman. Mebbe we'll hold a meetin' an' give you Alice without any further trouble. She's got no pectorator now, you see, an' you can give her a good home in Salt Lake City."

"A home in which her every wish shall be gratified!" exclaimed the Mormon, catching at a straw, and not shrewd enough to notice the deep vein of sarcasm that pervaded Colorado's tones.

"I always thought so, though I didn't let on," said the Deadwooder. "Merciless Maud bez killed enough; she'll never wipe you out, Timothy."

"Thanks for your assurance," cried the Mormon. "One ov these days I will remember Deadwood for its timely help."

"You will! Thet's good! But hyer we ar' at ther Casino. You'll take three fingers ov rats-bane with me, pard?"

Timothy Tenwives halted before the lighted front of the Full-Hand and involuntarily drew back.

"No danger in thar, old fellow!" and Colorado's hand fell upon his shoulder. "Walk right in. We'll find ther Casino empty at this hour, an' thar I'll divulge ther plan fer yer salvation."

He pushed the Mormon forward and a moment later the two entered the place.

As they did so a motley crowd of dark-faced men at the counter started back with looks, oaths, and exclamations of recognition!

"My God!" cried the Mormon recoiling. "Am I in a trap? You said the Casino was empty. These are not the men who want to save me from the clutches of my Mormon wife."

He fled toward the door, but the sallow hand of Colorado Clate darted madly after him and clutched him by the collar.

"Thar's just whar ye fool yerself, Mormon spider!" he cried, as he dragged the terror-stricken polygamist back and held him up to the gaze of all. "These ar' ther very pards who ar' eager ter save ye from ther hands ov ther Blushin' Daisy ov ther Mountain Top! Stand up an' look 'em in ther face, an' don't wilt like a dish-rag. Let me whisper in yer ear ther plan I propose. Thar's only one way fer us ter save ye from thet woman, an' thet's ter hang yer ourselves!"

At this a boisterous laugh parted the lips of the Deadwood toughs, and Timothy Tenwives, the Salt Lake City villain, gasped despairingly as his brain whirled, and his limbs gave way beneath him.

It was true that he was to be saved from the hands of Maud, the Merciless; but in such a horrible manner!

CHAPTER XXIX.

MORMON MADNESS.

"WELL, if I haven't trooped back into the tiger's lair, I don't know anything, I've fallen among thieves for a fact. Heaven keep me now if I'm worth helpin'; but I fear that it's all up with T. Tenwives."

Thus spoke the rascally Mormon as hope vanished, and he found himself in the clutches of Colorado Clate who, with his friends, was enjoying the wife-hunter's fright.

Fear had whitened the Mormon's face, as well it might, for he was in a most unpleasant predicament, and one that threatened to result very disastrously within a few minutes.

They were going to preserve him from Merciless Maud's vengeance by hanging him.

The thought made his very blood run cold.

"You wouldn't do that, would you?" he made out to gasp looking up into Colorado's face.

"Why not, old wife sharp?" was the derisive retort. "You want ter escape that tigress's claws, don't yer?"

"Yes, but—"

"Wal, ther's no other chance fer yer. You oughter take ter ther noose with a chuckle, thinkin' how you'll cheat her slick an' clean. She may be prowlin' through Deadwood somewhere, for ez I told yer she finished Paradise Paul's career not two hours ago; tharfore we'll jerk je off hyar. Toss a rope over that cross-beam, boys, an' kick a whisky bar'l under it."

The Mormon's late experience with those same men on the Denver trail was enough to chill the marrow in his bones when he thought of it.

He looked appealingly at the hard crowd, but a glance told him that he might as well turn to statues for help.

He knew that the toughs of Deadwood hated a Mormon above all living things, and as he, one of that people, had invaded their town for the purpose of robbing it of a beautiful young woman, he could not think why they should respect him.

The Deadwooders were eager to obey Colorado Clate's commands.

In less than two minutes the lariat dangled from the heavy beam that reached from one side of the Casino to the other, and heavy cow-hide boots had helped to place an empty whisky barrel in position beneath it.

"I've agreed ter furnish ther subject an' hyar he is—a regular Mormon!" cried Colorado, forcing the terrified wife-hunter toward the improvised gallows. "We've had every kind ov fun in ther Casino 'ceptin' a hangin', an' if ther present subject ain't a gentleman, he's got a neck like one."

Resistance on the Mormon's part was useless; he was forced forward by the Deadwood giant and brought up standing before the barrel.

The crowd had already formed a ring, with the barrel in the center, and one of their number now leaped upon the platform and reached down for the prisoner as he was brought up.

"For Heaven's sake, gentlemen, don't rob my children of a kind, indulgent father," said the Mormon, resolved on making one last appeal for mercy. "Think of the hearts that will suffer, of the women left husbandless."

"Oh, come, Timothy!" roared Colorado. "We're doin' nine Mormon wives a favor to-night, an' Deadwood a world ov good. Arter ther hangin', we'll resolve ourselves inter a

lodge ov sorrow an' draw up resolutions ov respect fer ther deceased. Thet'll make ther widders' hearts leap fer joy. Hyar he is, Tiger Tom! Git a good grip on ther old groundberry an' pull 'im up!"

The man on the barrel clutched Timothy's collar, which was made of good stuff, and with Colorado's assistance landed him on the oval scaffold, scarcely large enough to sustain the two.

The human circle now contracted until the barrel occupied a very small common center, and the Mormon spider could look down into the merciless eyes and swarthy faces of the Deadwood toughs.

Almost before he could resist, the noose of the lariat was thrown over his head and drawn taut under his chin.

"Thar, old varmint! I wish yer a swift journey ter Mormon paradise!" exclaimed Tiger Tom, as he sprung from the barrel, leaving Timothy Tenwives the only occupant of the head. "Think ov ther wives about ter be left desolate, think ov ther little ones bereft ov a father's keer, an' then—choke!"

This was greeted with an outburst of coarse laughter, which ended suddenly as the Mormon threw one hand up and clutched the rope above his head.

It was a desperate man's last grasp for life.

"Hands down!" sternly thundered Colorado, as he strode forward with two revolvers aimed at the Mormon's head. "Hands down, I say, or I'll send yer home with a brainless head! You don't want ter go in thet manner do yer, Timothy?"

"Mercy—no!" and the hand fell at the Mormon's side.

Colorado had halted within two feet of the barrel.

"Get ready!" he continued, still addressing the man on the barrel. "I'm goin' ter kick the bar'l from under ye in about one minute. When Maud finds yer, ye'll be beyond her vengeance, an' ye'll owe it all ter us, too."

Timothy Tenwives said nothing, but shut his teeth hard and threw a stolid look down into Colorado's face.

He would plead no more, for, knowing that mercy was out of the question, he had resolved in an instant, as it were, to die game.

"Count five for me, Tiger," said Colorado glancing at Tiger Tom as he got ready to send the barrel from under the Mormon elder by a vigorous kick. "Count kinder fast, fer the old galoot's resigned to his fate an' I'm dry."

"All right!" said the tough addressed, and he instantly began.

"One!—two!—"

"Hold a moment!" interrupted the Mormon.

"Wal—"

"Tell Alice—"

"Nol you sha'n't insult her with a message ov Mormon love!" grated Colorado Clate throwing up his hand. "Go on with ther count, Tiger!"

Timothy Tenwives succumbed.

"Three!—four!—"

Just then the door was kicked open by some one on the outside, and a loud voice rung through the Casino.

"I'll finish the count, Deadwood bruisers!"

"Great Jehosaphat! Broadcloth Burt!" ejaculated twenty dark faced men as their hands reached for their ready revolvers.

They were answered by the crack of a revolver, and the rope, severed completely about two feet above the Mormon's head, dropped on his shoulders.

"I believe in the eternal justness of things," continued the man at the door who held two revolvers in his outstretched hands. "You have no right to hang that man. He belongs to one who has sworn to avenge her wrongs. Make way for him, or I'll make it myself."

The Deadwood toughs could stare at the speaker, but they dared not lift a hand against him. His revolvers had suddenly dropped to a level with their heads, and his feat of shooting off the rope told them what was in store for them if they showed any stubbornness. Calm and erect and straight as an arrow, stood the Denverite in the doorway.

Once before he had saved the Mormon spider from their lariat; now he was doing it again.

It could not be that they were friends.

"No; Broadcloth Burt was saving him for the sworn blow."

The men who still surrounded the occupant of the barrel understood the meaning of the dandy's last sentence.

If they made no lane for the Mormon's escape, the man from Denver would make one with his revolvers!"

"Let ther Mormon viper crawl away, boys," said Colorado, in a whisper. "We'll get on ther fashion-plate's track an' treat him ter a lead-mine."

The crowd separated, and taking advantage of the unexpected help, Timothy Tenwives sprung from the barrel, and rushed toward the door.

"I'll make this square some day," he said, glancing up into the Denverite's face as he passed under the leveled revolvers and crossed the threshold of the den.

"No thanks," was the answer. "Make your self scarce. I've saved your life for Maud th

Merciless to take it in any manner she sees fit."

The Mormon shut his hands and his eyes were seen to flash.

"Then you've worked in vain, for by the stars in heaven! I'll never die by her hand!" he hissed.

He had passed into the night, leaving Broadcloth Burt to face the human tigers whom he had cowed.

He held them all at bay and speechless with the deadly weapons in his hands.

It was not the first time he had faced the same gang since sunset; he knew them, every one, from their new leader to the meanest ruffian in the lot.

"Your man is gone," he said. "Can't you see that fate always interferes in his behalf? He is not for you, I tell you. As for me, I am at your service whenever you wish to call me to account. Let me tell you another thing. Colonel Sandbanks, the prisoner of the pit under Monte Mark's shanty, has escaped."

"The deuce he has!" ejaculated Colorado Clate.

"It is a fact which investigation will confirm," was the quiet rejoinder. "I will now say good-night, gentlemen." And the revolvers and their owner were withdrawn almost as suddenly as they had made their appearance.

Broadcloth Burt, with a gleam of triumph in his eyes, walked rapidly toward the shanties on the street, but in the center of the thoroughfare he came suddenly upon the apparition of a man.

"What! you here yet?" he said, recognizing the man at once. "Why don't you leave Deadwood? I didn't cut the lariat with my bullet for you to stay in the tiger's den. Now make yourself scarce."

"Not till I've paid the Deadwood devils for their villainy!" was the hissed response. "You have a revolver for me? Ah! yes! Now look out, ruffians! You've looped me twice. This is a Mormon's vengeance!"

Broadcloth Burt's right hand revolver was snatched from his grasp before he could restrain the infuriated Mormon, and the next moment he saw him rush headlong toward the Casino.

"Let the fool go!" he said.

He saw Timothy Tenwives reach the door, which flew wide, as if to welcome him, and the next moment the mad Mormon was standing in the light, pouring the contents of the revolver into the startled crowd in front of the bar!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DASH FOR DENVER.

"I've seen fools before, but that one yonder caps the climax," smiled the man from Denver as he turned away, leaving to himself the Mormon whom he had just rescued from the rope of the infuriated Deadwooders.

Timothy Tenwives was still in the light that streamed from the interior of the Full-Hand Casino, paying off old debts with the sport's revolver.

The first shot had not only startled, but it had killed, and the two following had had the same effect.

For at least once in his life the Mormon spider, who had cringed and begged for life in the shadow of the noose, now fought with the courage of the lion—faced his enemies when he might have escaped without touching a trigger.

He must have known that he could not long maintain the unequal combat, although he had taken the toughs unawares, that they would soon rush out upon him, overwhelm him, and leave him a corpse in the streets of Deadwood.

But this did not daunt him. "They've tarred and feathered me; they have noosed me twice, but by the creed of the Saints! they've got to suffer for it," passed through clinched teeth. "It is Timothy Tenwives against Deadwood. They have the most weapons, but I've got the drop on the delectable gang, and I'll spot a few of them while I'm at it."

As we have said, Broadcloth Burt did not tarry to witness the outcome of the Mormon's mad attack on the Deadwood toughs, but turned away and left him in the midst of it.

One of his revolvers had been snatched from his grasp by the spider, but he still possessed another, and it in his hands was capable of doing bloody work.

He crossed the street and disappeared between two cabins, walking rapidly like a man eager to reach a certain place within a given time.

Five minutes later he halted in front of a shanty—not Captain Paul's this time—and pushing the door open, leaned inside.

Almost instantly he was joined by a young girl who uttered a low exclamation of satisfaction as she recognized the man from Denver.

"I am back," he said with a smile. "Fortunately, I did not have to kill any one, but I battled the toughs all the same. They had the Mormon seraph on a whisky barrel with a rope round his neck, and I got there just in time to spoil a hangin' matinee. When I left him he was payin' the crowd back for past offenses, but that game won't win. It's all silent now, Alice; the firing has ceased, and I expect there's

a dead Mormon in the street before the Full-Hand."

The Deadwood belle did not speak for a moment, but listened attentively as she gazed up into the sport's face.

"We might as well be off," she said. "Everything is so still down there."

"I don't quite understand it, when the Deadwood toughs are mad as hornets. They are not the men who keep quiet under such circumstances as these. I told them that the pit beneath Monte Mark's cabin was empty."

"Has Colonel Sandbanks really effected his escape?"

"He isn't there, at any rate, and he got out in good time to save his precious neck," answered Broadcloth Burt. "I would advise him to give Deadwood a wide birth. Paradise Paul is dead, you know, and the human tigers want him for the choking he administered. He must do just what we have to do now, Alice."

"And that is—"

"Look out for ourselves. We are going to turn our faces toward Denver—"

"Thank fortune!" interrupted Alice, clutching the sport's arm. "That means that I am going to the patient one who has waited so long for me?"

"I dope so."

"Then I cannot leave Deadwood too soon!"

Broadcloth Burt looked down into the joyful face upturned in the light of the stars, and read in its expression the joy that throbbed her heart.

The next moment the pair were pushing rapidly toward the southern suburbs of the town, the Denver sport at the girl's side, with a revolver clutched firmly in his right hand.

"For the sake of humanity don't abandon me," said a voice so near that Broadcloth Burt wheeled toward the speaker, and instantly covered the object that met his gaze.

"Come forward and show up!" he said in stern tones and the portly figure of a man approached.

"Colonel Sandbanks!" exclaimed the Denverite.

"That's who I am," was the response. "That infernal pit is haunted, an' I've got the rheumatism besides."

"You're in a bad fix, colonel."

"I should gently whisper that I am. That place discounts the Black Hole, an' I'd sooner endure a thousand deaths than stand it another hour. Ain't you goin' down the Denver trail?"

"What if I am?"

"Then I'll be your companion. I'm homeless now, for the Deadwood toughs burned the Setemup—set fire to it like cowards in the absence of the proprietor. But I got a little revenge for the deed. I had the satisfaction of burying my fingers behind their captain's wind-pipe."

Colonel Sandbanks's eyes glittered with triumph, and he shut his hands convulsively as if they felt Paradise Paul's throat once more.

"So you want to go to Denver?" asked the sport quietly.

"I've got to get out of this accursed town an' go somewhere else," was the response. "I've made the discovery that I'm not in a healthy climate just at the present time, an' that speedy immigration will improve my chances for a green old age. I can go ter Denver with you, can't I, Broadcloth?"

Before the Denver sport could answer, Alice stepped to his side and spoke for him.

"Yes, sir; you may share our fortunes," she said kindly.

Colonel Sandbanks started at sound of her voice like a person who suddenly hears a joyful call.

"It is the girl, by Jove!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Now I am goin' to Denver or die! I didn't get out of that rascally pit a moment too soon. I'll keep my eyes on the Deadwood rose from now till the time I play the game through to the close. She sha'n't be sent to wait for me under another tree. I'll change my tactics. If I can't set up a cold deck on that Denver sport between here and the city, I'll stock the cards thar. In luck ag'in, Simon Sandbanks! Fortune smiles on her chosen one."

He then thanked Alice for what she had said, and announced himself ready for the journey to Denver.

As for Broadcloth Burt, he said nothing, although it was evident that he did not relish the company he was taking on.

"I've made a few dollars in that blasted town, but I willingly leave them behind," said the proprietor of the Setemup as he waved a parting good-by to Deadwood from among the southern suburbs.

"You've burned me out an' I've choked your boss citizen, so I guess we're about even. Denver's a better town than ever Deadwood will be. I've linked my fortunes to those of one of Denver's boss citizens, the Honorable Broadcloth Burt, who is a reg'lar jim-dandy in more ways than one."

"Are you going to Denver, or have you made up your mind to stand thar an' speak?" said a voice at the colonel's elbow, and the hand of the Denver sport fell heavily upon his shoulder.

"Excuse me, Broadcloth. I was just goin' ter remark—"

"Then stay whar you are and remark it," was the interruption. "We are going to Denver!"

"That's just whar I'm bound for," and Simon Sandbanks sprang forward. "We've struck the Denver trail at last, haven't we, my dear?"

The girl gave the speaker a look which told him that such familiarity was not reciprocal, but it did not blunt the colonel's indiscretion.

"I'll strike it rich in Denver," he went on. "I'll rise to higher things thar than I attained in Deadwood, an' one of these days, Alice, you'll not be ashamed of your friend, Simon Sandbanks."

Alice turned away, knowing that to humor the indiscreet Deadwooder by listening would only increase his volubility and her embarrassment.

The trio had left Deadwood fairly behind, having struck the Deadwood-Denver trail, and were pushing rapidly toward a certain point which Broadcloth Burt seemed anxious to reach.

All at once the Denver sport sprang from the trail, and disappeared, but only for a moment.

When he reappeared he held the bridles of two horses, at sight of which Simon Sandbanks started, and let slip an ejaculation of disappointment.

"That doesn't look much like goin' to Denver," he said. "Two horses for three! The scheme seems to have been knocked out of time already."

"I've got only two horses, colonel, and they're not used to carrying double," said Broadcloth Burt at this juncture.

"The deuce they're not!" cried the colonel. "That leaves me at the mercy of ther tigers ov Deadwood."

"Not if you stir yourself."

"Me!—a man nearly down with the rheumatism!" howled Sandbanks dolefully. "I never thought you'd leave me unprotected, to perish at the hands of the demons who want my blood. Why didn't you tell me you had but two animals here?"

"You never asked me to," grinned the Denverite, as he turned to help Alice into one of the saddles.

Colonel Sandbanks suddenly grated his teeth and bounded toward the sport, with the lion in his nature aroused in an instant.

"You don't want to play me false," he hissed, clutching the sport's shoulder. "If I am only Simon Sandbanks, I'm no baby who kin be deserted with impunity. Look into my eyes, sir; thar's fire thar! Don't intimate to me, sir, that I am to be abandoned at this stage of the game, or by heavens, sir, I'll—I'll—"

"You'll do what? speak it out!" and the hand of Broadcloth Burt closed on the landlord's arm, and with an iron grip almost lifted him off his feet. "Look here, old fellow! when you threaten me, you threaten Broadcloth Burt. We are going to Denver; you stay here!"

That was all.

Simon Sandbanks felt his arm suddenly released and he found himself alone on the trail with the night around him.

"I'll pay him back for it!" he hissed. "I'll do it if it costs Simon Sandbanks his life!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

REVOLVER ELOQUENCE.

FOR several minutes the colonel stood like a man bewildered on the Denver trail; he had been deserted, left to his fate so suddenly that amazement had taken possession of him.

The hoof-beats of the horses ridden by the Denverite and Alice faded in the distance, telling him, ere the last echo died away, that they were actually riding toward Denver while he had lost the prize on which he had set his heart and was moreover within reach of the toughs of Deadwood.

Added to his fear of capture, was the fact that he was totally unarmed, and this was not liable to lull the colonel into security.

"Won't I get even with you for this desertion, Broadcloth Burt?" he blurted, shaking his fist in the direction taken by the couple.

"You will discover that I'm no infant ter be insulted with impunity. I'm Simon Sandbanks, who dared ther dangers of ther gold-fields in '49, and ef I hev been keepin' hotel for twenty years, I haven't forgotten how to avenge an insult. The girl was willin' ter take me along, but you wouldn't do it, Broadcloth; therefore, you've got ter take the consequences."

The doughty colonel was in a passion; his eyes flashed as he spoke, and he would have dealt severely with the Denverite if he had had him in his power at that moment.

But threats and curses could not mend matters, and Simon Sandbanks was compelled to rest his tongue.

He turned and looked toward Deadwood.

"I can't go on unarmed," he said, "an' no stage will accommodate me by coming along. I've got to get defensive weapons somehow, if I expect to remain any time in this country."

He was still gazing toward Deadwood when

an apparition appeared on the trail, and he seemed to turn suddenly into a state of horror.

"Found already!" he gasped. "They soon struck my trail. Simon Sandbanks, if you've got ter die, die like a man."

He could not have stirred if a serpent had crawled toward him, and he stood in the middle of the trail with his gaze riveted on the figure that came forward from the depths of the star-thrown shadows of rock and tree.

It stopped at last within arm's-length of the Deadwood landlord.

Suddenly he recoiled with eyes ready to dart from his head.

"My God! what have you been doin' in Deadwood?" he exclaimed, and the figure thrust out a hand and clutched his sleeve.

"I've annihilated the thirty toughs," was the answer.

"You? I'd like to see you annihilate such a gang as that!"

"I have done nothin' less."

"With what?"

"With this!" And there arose before the colonel's vision a heavy revolver, the sight of which sent him back an inch, and at the same time threw a covetous look into his eyes.

"An' you've been emptyin' that six-shooter into the Deadwood gang, eh?" he exclaimed.

"That's the weapon I used. Heavens! how they tumbled."

"I heard some sharp shots before I pulled out ov Deadwood."

"I was shooting them. Do you know that they were going to hang me?"

"No," and Colonel Sandbanks added under his breath that he would not have objected if the Deadwood toughs had succeeded in their designs. "How many did you get away with?" he added aloud.

"All I shot at. They tumbled right and left."

"And you tell me that you annihilated the hull band in six shots? Come, Mr. Mormon, that won't do."

"Why didn't they follow me, then? I am here alive; I was not tracked from Deadwood."

"That's no sign that you won't be hunted like a wolf. They had me in a hole a while ago, an' they war goin' ter settle with me for chokin' Captain Paul, but I'm out ov their clutches."

"Did the man who saved me save you?"

"No; I saved myself."

"Then you owe him nothing."

"Yes, but I do."

"What?"

"The eternal hatred of Simon Sandbanks!"

"What do you hate him for?"

"There! you ar' treadin' on private ground now," said the colonel, determined not to impart to the Mormon spider the intelligence that Alice was then on her way to Denver.

"All right," said the polygamist, biting his lip. "We are not going to fall out about our differences of opinion. Do you like anybody in Deadwood just now?"

"Not a soul!"

"They burned your hotel?"

"Yes, an' one man paid for it, too."

"They were going to hang you when they got ready."

"That's a fact, Mormon, an' they were nearly ready when I got away."

"Then, if you don't like a soul in Deadwood—if you would like to get even with everybody up there, why don't you go back and wipe out the old score?"

Colonel Sandbanks looked amazed into the Mormon's eyes.

"I'm no idiot!" he exclaimed. "Do you think I'm going back thar ter make a fool-martyr ov myself? When I reach the conclusion that Simon Sandbanks is tired ov life, I'll go back to Deadwood an' present myself ter ther shootin' pilgrims ov ther Full-Hand Casino. Not any ov it in mine just now, my Utah angel."

Simon Sandbanks had discovered even in the dim starlight, that the Mormon had a wild, unnatural look, that at times his eyes would blaze up, and then sink suddenly into an almost expressionless stare.

"Was the man mad?"

"You ought to go back there and settle all your debts before you go to Denver," said Timothy Tenwives.

"That's ther way it may look to you, but excuse me, my friend. If you hev annihilated the thirty toughs thar's nobody in Deadwood for me to settle with."

"I'll take you back."

"You?"

"Of course. I'm not afraid to go back to Deadwood. Ha! I went there after a wife and got—blood! They tumbled right and left from the Casino's bar while I blazed away. They thought a Mormon elder couldn't shoot. Didn't I show them that I was no slouch with the trigger? But, come, we're going back to Deadwood."

"I guess not," said the colonel. "I haven't any business thar now."

"Yes, you have."

"But I don't want ter go thar now."

"That makes no difference. The Deadwooders want to see you. I'll stand by you,

and the ones I spared awhile ago, we'll kill together."

Colonel Sandbanks tried to jerk away from the Mormon, but the fingers seemed to fasten in his flesh; he was a prisoner!

"I guess we'll go back!" was hissed in his face, and he suddenly found himself looking into the muzzle of the Mormon's pistol. "Not willing to go, eh? You'll get used to the new state ov affairs after ye're thar awhile. They can't annihilate me!"

"Ain't you afraid ov meetin' Maud there?" asked Sandbanks, as a last resort. "She was thar since sundown, I am told, for she finished Captain Paul."

"Maud doesn't frighten me now. Why should a man who has been noosed twice be afraid of a woman?"

"I would fear her if I had faced death a thousand times," said Simon. "She is in Deadwood now—at this very minute."

"I want to see her. Back we go! Forward march, colonel! We'll create a sensation in Deadwood."

The Mormon's prisoner—for Simon Sandbanks was nothing less—found himself in a most dangerous predicament.

He was sure that he had fallen into the clutches of a man whose reason had been dethroned by recent events, and the madman was going to conduct him back to the place where death surely awaited them both.

He cursed the fortune that had overtaken him, but saw no way out of the difficulty.

"I'll have to put up with it!" he grated under his breath, glancing madly at his mad captor.

"But just wait till I get a chance at you, my Mormon pilgrim. Give me only half a chance between hyer and Deadwood, an' if I don't leave the buzzards a breakfast on ther Denver trail, I'll know why not!"

A minute after the command "forward march" had been given, Simon Sandbanks found himself walking quite rapidly toward Deadwood.

The Mormon elder at his side never removed his eyes from the prisoner and carried cocked in his right hand the revolver which a short time before he had snatched from Broadcloth Burt's grip.

"We'll find a revolver for you, when we strike Deadwood, colonel," he said all at once.

"Do," was the answer. "I'll thank you for the use ov one for just one minute," and Simon Sandbanks threw a terrible look toward the man with him on the trail.

"We'll make Deadwood howl before morning!" continued the Mormon. "The few I may have spared we'll shoot down in their tracks. It will be a picnic; it will be bloodier than the meadows were!"

Colonel Sandbanks started. "Were you thar?" he asked.

There was no reply, but the glittering eyes of the mad Mormon were answer enough.

"You needn't talk," said Sandbanks under his breath. "Your infernal eyes ar' talkin' now. Yes, my Utah viper, put a revolver into my hands, an' if I don't kill a Mormon murderer the next second, I'll agree to die myself! I'll cheat Maud the Merciless out of her revenge. I'd go to Deadwood for a chance at you!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN THE AVENGER'S CLUTCHES.

THE reader has no doubt put but little reliance on Timothy Tenwives's statement that, single-handed and alone, he had annihilated the organization known as the Thirty Toughs, therefore we hardly need say here that he had by no means accomplished this extraordinary feat.

While his mad shots from the front of the Full-Hand had tumbled four or five of the ruffians, for, despite his outward regard for piety, the Mormon was a dead shot, there were enough left to make things lively for him and the rest of their enemies.

It was during the confusion that followed the shooting that the Mormon spider effected his escape apparently unpursued, but the toughs had not by any means intended to let the slayer off so easy.

The maddest of the party made a break for the stables, but Colorado Clate called a halt, and drew them back.

"Thet Mormon galoot can no more get away than he kin fly," said the boss ruffian, addressing the crowd. "Thar lie four of the best pards that ever touched a trigger er faced a full band. Let the wife-hunter go. We've got another person ter look after just now. I kin think ov only one person now—the woman what stole inter Deadwood from ther mountains an' took ther cap'n's last band!"

A howl of vengeance rose from the throats of the crowd, and in a flash the Mormon and his work seemed to have vanished from the minds of the Deadwood toughs.

"Ye'r right, Colorado. We'll trim thet woman down first. More than Cap'n Paul's hand fetched her ter Deadwood to-night. She wants Alice also, an' ez she doesn't know thet the gal's gone off with Broadcloth Burt, she's somewhar in town."

This was enough, and the Deadwood pards

swore then and there to hunt Maud the Merciless down first, and to punish her terribly for the awful revenge she had taken on their captain.

Standing in the dark shadow of a cabin not far from this scene, was the person against whom the hatred of the toughs was directed.

Merciless Maud had not quitted Deadwood—not even after her visit to Paradise Paul's shanty.

She had paid him for the past, but that was not enough.

Did she know that fortune and the night were to throw the Mormon spider across her path, or was she waiting for the toughs to throw down the gage of battle?

She knew this: that for her to remain in Deadwood meant death upon discovery; she had robbed the Deadwooders of their leader, and not a ruffian in the whole town would say that in slaying him she had only carried out a just revenge.

She had undoubtedly heard the shots fired by Timothy Tenwives in front of the Casino, but she did not know, perhaps, that they came from the revolver of the very man she wanted.

If she had hunted the Mormon, believing him to be in Deadwood, he had eluded her.

Yes, reader, only a short distance from the Full-Hand stood Maud, the Merciless, still in Deadwood and the tigers' lair.

"You'd better go and prepare your captain for the grave," she said as she watched the crowd in front of the den. "Don't bother me, please. I've had blood enough from the veins of the Deadwood league, but you must not push Maud to the wall."

She watched the crowd move away; she saw it break into fragments as its members, carrying cocked revolvers in their hands, began to search Deadwood, she knew for whom.

Almost touching the rough logs of the cabin, she looked like a part of the structure itself, and as she stood silent and statue-like, the eyes of the Deadwooders did not discover her.

Merciless Maud was in an uncomfortable situation, yet she did not seem to realize it.

"Hunt me all you please, but don't find me," she murmured, a smile playing on her lips. "I am not going to be driven from Deadwood. I came back here to stay till I got ready to quit the place. All the toughs in Dakota cannot keep me from my purpose!"

Once or twice she thought discovery inevitable, but the danger passed away, although, as if in wait, like a prying tigress, she kept her station.

The shanty stood on the street that joined the Denver trail in the suburbs of the town.

Was she looking for somebody from the south?

Maud, the Merciless seemed to take delight in the thought that the hunt of the Deadwood toughs was proving abortive.

They had passed and repassed her, yet not an eye had singled her out, and the outside of the cabin was as secure as the darkness within.

All at once there came two gliding figures from the south.

Merciless Maud at once seemed to take an unusual interest in them, for bending forward she watched them with much curiosity.

Nearer and nearer they came until within the star-thrown shadow of the cabin against which she stood they halted as if for consultation.

"My God!" suddenly gasped the Mormon wife. "The Utah snake has crawled into my power!"

Her eyes seemed to flash fire while she fastened them upon the two men, but more particularly upon the one nearest them.

She had seen that figure too often to be mistaken now; she had suffered at the hands of that man indignities and insults sufficient to have killed a thousand women.

It was the wife-hunter, the infamous Utah spider—the man who had not his equal in infamy in the Mormon kingdom.

And his companion?

Merciless Maud did not know him so well, but she had seen him before.

"Have they linked fortunes?" she asked herself as she eyed the two men. "Can it be that Colonel Sandbanks has become the spider's partner in villainy?"

With the last question she glided toward the two men, who seemed to be listening to a sound that came up the Denver trail.

A panther never approached a victim with more stealth than Merciless Maud crept upon them, but with her eyes fastened on but one.

"That's a horse," said the Mormon at the ear of the man he had brought back to Deadwood at the revolver's muzzle and against his will.

"An' it's comin' full tilt too. We'd better get closer to the shanty. He's comin' on like a thunderbolt now. Jehu! Mormon; it can't be Broadcloth comin' back."

"No. That man has gone to Denver."

Colonel Sandbanks drew back and hugged the cabin, but all the while he watched Timothy Tenwives closely, for he was still waiting for that opportunity for which he had waited and watched since his capture by the Mormon villain.

"Mebbe that hoss will give me the chance I want," he said under his breath. "Just take those serpent eyes ov yours off me for a minute—"

"Great God! who are you?"

The sudden interruption fell in startling tones from the Mormon's lips, and he recoiled as if a specter had risen from the ground to confront him.

"I am the avenger of wrong!" was the response, and the skeleton hand of Merciless Maud clutched the wrist that joined the right hand of the Mormon. "I am Merciless Maud, your wife by a lie and made her own avenger by the decrees of Justice."

"Heavens! colonel, are you going to see this tigress tear me up?"

"Ef she wants ter," was the cool response.

"He belongs ter you, woman; but if you don't want ter fix him just turn him over to me."

"I can avenge myself. Are you his pard?"

"Until now I was his prisoner. He caught me unawares down the Denver trail and brought me back to Deadwood to help him finish the thirty toughs. But, Great Caesar! hear that hoss comin' yonder!"

Colonel Sandbanks instinctively turned toward the south and listened to the oncoming steed that was beating the well-worn road with its hoofs.

All at once the flying steed came in sight, and the next moment was abreast of the breathless trio.

"Look—look!" cried Simon Sandbanks, whirling upon the avenger. "Don't you see? There! The horse is gone, but you saw the girl?"

"What girl?"

"Why, the one hanging to the horse's mane. I saw her. My God! if she falls off, she will be trampled to death!"

Merciless Maud did not reply, but stared at the colonel, who seemed to have been deprived of his wits.

"I saw nothing," she said. "Did you, Mormon viper?" and she threw her question into the eyes of the man she held.

"I did see something, but I wasn't thinking about a girl."

"Neither was I," and Maud smiled. "With my hands on you at last, I have other things to think about. There! somebody has stopped that horse!"

The crack of a revolver had broken the night, further down the street, and with it the sound of hoofs grew still.

Colonel Sandbanks started forward with an exclamation, but halted suddenly of his own accord.

"I guess it wouldn't be safe for me to venture down thar," he said, with a glance at Merciless Maud as he drew back. "But Alice has come back to Deadwood; I know it. That was her clinging to the mane of that horse. That Denverite will follow, if he lives; then I'll get a chance at him."

"Do what you please," said Maud; "I don't want you. I have found the man I do want—the last one of the two who made me what I am—the outcast of Mormondom!"

"It was Paradise Paul," said the Mormon elder.

"I know! No lies, wretch!" and the speaker's fingers seemed to sink into the villain's flesh. "Timothy Tenwives, what fate do you expect?"

The Mormon tried to look defiant, but the effort was a lamentable failure.

He could jerk a pistol from Broadcloth Burt and face the Deadwood toughs, but in the presence of the woman he had made an outcast and an avenger, he could only quail.

"I'll make it all right, Maud," he finally said, his courage disappearing like a vapor. "I'm willing to acknowledge that I didn't do exactly right by you. I'll give you enough to cancel the whole debt."

"No; the riches of all Mormondom could not do that!" was hissed at his ear. "Timothy Tenwives, the day of just retribution has come at last!"

"That's right! settle with the Utah skunk and pay my debt at the same time!" cried Colonel Sandbanks. "I've been watchin' for a chance ter turn ther tables on him all ther way ter Deadwood. Ef he hed given me an opportunity, Maud, you wouldn't be holdin' him thar with yer eyes on fire. Yes, settle with him now an' forever. I've got business elsewhar!"

The late proprietor of the Setemup did not wait for the avenger to reply, but turned on his heel and darted away.

A few yards from the spot he stopped and listened.

"That shot I heard killed the hoss," he said.

"Hark! a dozen men ar' comin' this way."

The following minute the head of a band of roughs came in sight, and the foremost, a stalwart Deadwooder, carried the limp figure of a beautiful young girl in his arms.

Sandbanks almost betrayed himself with a cry.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

STRIKING FOR A WIFE.

In a manner startling to all who were witnesses, Alice had come back to Deadwood.

She had entered the place hanging to the mane of a runaway horse, and in imminent danger of falling under him and being trampled to death.

Colonel Sandbanks, who, from the spot where he had halted, saw the giant Deadwooder carry the girl by in his arms, was ready to believe that she was dead.

"They shot the girl instead ov the hoss, curse the Black Hills vultures!" he grated. "I thought she war on the way ter Denver with Broadcloth Burt, but hyer she is instead, dead in the grip of Colorado Clate!"

He did not lose sight of the gang until he saw Colorado kick open a shanty door and enter with the girl in his arms.

The rest of the toughs followed their leader to the threshold and then withdrew.

The excited colonel waited till the men had passed beyond sight, and then crept noiselessly upon the cabin.

Was Alice really dead?

If not, had not fortune brought her back to Deadwood for him to win at last?

A few seconds later Simon Sandbanks stood at the door, which was slightly ajar, and he was feasting his eyes on a scene that made them glitter with indignation.

On a pallet on the floor of the shanty lay the shapely form of the Deadwood queen, and Colorado Clate was kneeling over it, in the mellow light of the candle that burned on the table at his right.

The attitude of the captain of the Deadwood toughs was one of respectful attention and solicitude, and he was trying to restore the young girl to consciousness.

Colonel Sandbanks stood on tip-toe and tried to look into Alice's face by gazing over Colorado's shoulder.

"If she's dead these tough customers will hear from me," he hissed. "She doesn't stir and ef I'm not mistaken thar's blood on her temple."

He could not obtain the view desired from the outside of the cabin and so, with his eyes riveted on Colorado, whose back was turned toward him, he opened the door wide enough to admit his body, and stepped cat-like across the threshold.

It was a hazardous venture for if the slightest sound should strike the Deadwooder's ears he would spring up like a tiger.

But fortune seemed to favor the colonel's game.

He advanced toward Colorado Clate, and soon found himself looking over his broad shoulder into the girl's face.

A whiter face than was Alice's at that moment had never met the colonel's gaze; it was of the hue of marble and looked as cold.

Not a muscle stirred and the girl lay on the pallet to every outward appearance dead.

It was a singular tableau, the one revealed by the candle-light.

Colonel Sandbanks grew into a statue behind the Deadwood tough; he must have heard the throbs of his heart.

Absorbed in his efforts to bring the girl back to life Colorado did not see the visitor who had stolen so silently into the shanty; he saw only the beautiful creature marble-like on the pallet before him.

All at once the hand which the tough had lifted fell back of its own accord, and then startlingly sudden the girl's eyes unclosed.

"Heavens! she lives!" exclaimed Simon Sandbanks.

The next instant Colorado Clate leaped up and whirled upon the unguarded speaker.

"What brought you here?" he demanded as his revolver leaped from his belt at the touch of his hand. "Don't you know that your life isn't worth a fig in Deadwood?"

"I'm perfectly aware ov that, but I've got an interest in that girl yonder."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"What is she to you?"

"An unprotected child, now that her protector is dead."

A smile parted Colorado's lips.

"Unprotected? not much. She belongs to Deadwood now. Yesterday she war Paradise Paul's ward; now Deadwood protects her. Isn't she well guarded, colonel?"

"I would call her so," admitted Sandbanks throwing a hasty glance toward Alice not sufficiently recovered to know what was going on.

"Then leave her with me an' make yerself mighty scarce. We'll stand by her through thick an' thin."

"You especially, I suppose."

"Yes."

"I thought so. Colorado, if you insult that girl in any manner I will call you to account for it."

"You will, you old choker?" and the new captain of the Deadwood toughs took a quick stride forward which brought him within arm's length of the colonel. "You call me to account. Curse your lyin' eyes! I ought ter send you ter kingdom now fer sinkin' yer fingers into Cap'n Paul's throat."

"You ought ter thank me."

"Fer what?"

"Fer makin' you captain ov the Thirty Toughs."

"But you didn't do it, although it wasn't your fault that you didn't. Merciless Maud is the person who promoted me."

"Then go out and thank her."

"I've been huntin' her for that purpose," grinned Colorado.

"Why, I found her before I was in Deadwood twenty minutes."

"Not to-night."

"To-night. I left her a little while ago."

"I would like to find that woman," the desperado said, lowering his voice.

"You dare not follow me to her."

Colorado glanced at the young girl before he replied.

"If you can show me Maud the Merciless I will go with you," he said to the colonel.

"That's just what I can do, an' inside ov five minutes at that."

The Deadwooder stepped to the cot on the floor.

"Keep quiet till I return," he whispered to Alice. "You are in safe quarters, and after that wild ride ov yer's you must hev rest. You have come back to Deadwood, an' we ar' all glad ov it, for it gives us a chance ter stand by you. Don't stir, Alice. I'm goin out a while fer yer good."

Then he rose and came toward the colonel.

"Now, show me this female vulture from Utah," he said, his dark eyes flashing with resentment. "Play me fair, Simon Sandbanks, an' the hand ov a tough sha'n't be raised against you this night."

"Foller me then."

Simon Sandbanks was confident that he had adroitly entrapped the man whom he led from the shanty.

"Things are working ter suit me after all," he murmured, "and if I don't come out on top to-night, may I never gaze at to-morrow's sun."

Colorado Clate exhibited the eagerness that tugged at his heart strings.

"What are you going ter do when you find Maud?" asked Sandbanks, as they strode down the street.

"Never mind. I only want you to find her for me. Please keep yer question-box locked."

Simon did not press the subject, nor did he speak again until he halted between two cabins whose log walls he could have touched by outstretching his hands.

"She isn't hyer," growled Colorado Clate.

"Thet's wher yer fool yerself, Colorado."

The colonel stepped toward one of the cabins and applied an ear to the logs.

"I'm pretty good at hittin' a target in the dark," he said in a low whisper as he came back and touched Colorado's sleeve. "You want ter find Maud the Merciless, yer say? Wal, go ter thet wall an' listen two minutes."

A moment later the leader of the Deadwood toughs was occupying the position the colonel had just left, and with an ear at the logs was listening attentively.

"Now I strike for the daisy blossom on the Black Hills!" fell suddenly from Simon Sandbanks's lips, and a second later he threw himself upon the desperado with the fury of a tiger.

It was a spring totally unexpected by the captain of the toughs, and it took him unawares, hurling him to the ground before he could resist.

Colonel Sandbanks weighed two hundred avoirdupois, and as he fell upon Colorado with all his weight he was enough to crush the stalwart rough.

"Maud isn't hyer, but I am, captain!" he hissed in his victims ear. "Don't you know that I'm a bad man ter trust after dark when thar's a woman in the case? Ef Deadwood intends ter keep that flower she'd better look after Simon Sandbanks first. Fortune an' thet hoss fetched her back for me—not for Colorado Clate an' his pards."

There followed a struggle on the ground between the cabins, for the Deadwooder had partly recovered from the attack and was making all the resistance possible.

It was victory or death for the colonel, and when he thought of the beautiful creature on the pallet in Colorado's cabin he breathed a new resolve to conquer.

"Now, Colorado, the stakes are mine," he suddenly hissed. "With one hand at yer throat and t'other at yer knife, I guess I'll play the hand that wins."

"Not yet, Simon Sandbanks!"

The knife fell, but midway the bronzed hand of Colorado arrested its progress, and broke the blow.

"Not yet, my Deadwood skunk!" he hissed in the colonel's face.

Simon Sandbanks with a desperate effort tore his arm from Captain Colorado's grip, and then, before it could be recaptured, he struck with all his might.

"That for Alice!" he grated. "Now tell me who wins, Colorado Clate?"

At the same time he sprang up, but the man had fought did not follow him.

"I'll take yer six-shooter along for an emergency," he said and when he walked away a moment afterward, he carried besides a knife the deadliest revolver in Deadwood.

"I thought I war gone when thet Mormon galoot war forcin' me back ter this place a while ago, but hang me! ef it wasn't fortune workin' all the time in my behalf. Old Timothy has fallen into the clutches ov the mad wife who has made short work ov him before this; I have finished Colorado Clate, and Alice the Deadwood blossom is at my disposal. Ef this ain't success, then I don't know the sound ov the word. By Jove! if it warn't risky, I'd go over to the Full Hand an' take a straight on my luck."

Thus elated, Simon Sandbanks hurried from the scene of his desperate tussle, and made rapid strides toward Colorado's cabin.

He reached it in a fever of excitement, but pushed the door cautiously open and stuck his head inside.

"Gone ter sleep ag'in!" parted his lips as his gaze fell upon the occupant of the pallet. "This is a reg'lar first-class bonanza, an' it all b'longs to me. For once I'm solidly on top, an' from this moment I'll date my happiness."

His eagerness carried him into the cabin and he bent over the Deadwood rose whom fatigue had wrapped in slumber.

Never before to Simon Sandbanks had Alice looked so beautiful.

"She's a perfect vision!" he ejaculated. "Of course I hate ter disturb her, but I must. Deadwood is no place for me an' when I go she must go, too. Come, my livin' poem, an' be the wife ov a gold king far from Deadwood an' its toughs."

He touched the girl's arm and she awoke with a slight exclamation.

"It's me—Colonel Sandbanks, an' yer devoted friend," said the man. "Colorado Clate won't be back any more. We'll try the Denver trail ag'in."

Before Alice could speak or resist, the arm of Colonel Sandbanks was around her, and lifting her from the floor, he turned toward the door.

But a second later he stopped with startling suddenness, and then staggered back with a gasping cry.

"My God! This beats perdition!" he ejaculated.

In the doorway, leaning quietly against the rough jamb, and with arms folded on his breast stood a man who was coolness itself, and Colonel Sandbanks had recognized him.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SPIDER'S FATE.

Yes, in Simon Sandbanks's expressive grammar, it "beat perdition."

The last man whom he wanted to appear on the scene stood before him, apparently unarmed, but terrible all the same.

It was Broadcloth Burt, the deadly Denverite, and the girl appeared about to drop from the colonel's arms as he stared at the man in the doorway.

For one brief minute the man from Denver eyed the Deadwooder without a word, then he advanced with outstretched hands.

"I'll take the girl," he said quietly, while his eyes added in language easily understood by Sandbanks: "You don't want to fool with me, old fellow."

Cowed by the look, and in a single moment deserted by courage, Colonel Sandbanks advanced a step and gave up his prisoner.

His willingness to comply with Broadcloth Burt's demand drew a smile to that worthy's lips.

"I war just goin' ter hunt yer up," the colonel said. "By Jove! I'm glad you came, for I doubted my ability to get out ov Deadwood alone. How did Alice get back so soon?"

"A bear sprung into the trail and her horse lost his head in an instant. Mine didn't act much better. I was unhorsed an' tossed against a tree rather roughly, but I'm hyer ag'in, ready for duty."

"So I see, an' I'm glad ov it," said the colonel. "Now, we'll get to Denver with Alice, er leave our bones bleachin' on the old trail. You an' me will make a reg'lar screamer ov a team—"

"Don't bother yourself about a partnership that can never exist," interrupted the sport quietly. "I'm quite able to land Alice in Denver without assistance."

The colonel bit his lip and recoiled.

"You'll permit me, though—"

"Not now, my valiant colonel. I take Alice home alone!"

"But I made it possible for you to do that."

"You? How?"

"I killed the man who guarded her!"

"I guess not."

"By Heavens! I did! If you will go with me I'll show the corpse ov the worst enemy you ever had exceptin' Captain Paul."

"I'll take your word for it, colonel," smiled the Denverite, moving toward the door.

The chagrined Deadwooder chewed his lip with rage and clinched his hands.

He had lost the girl again.

"Something always turns up just when I get to ther threshold ov success!" he flashed, when he suddenly found himself alone. "I had found the girl, an' war congratulating myself on my fortune when the Denver fashion-plate

puts in an appearance an' swamps the game! Now I'm twenty times worse off than nothin'. I've wiped out Cap'n Colorado, an' got all Deadwood fer my enemies. But I could stand that if Broadcloth Burt hedn't come back with a full hand. I'm more than disgusted. I wish the avengin' woman had wanted me instead ov the Mormon spider."

To be truthful, Colonel Sandbanks wished no such thing, for at that moment Timothy Ten-wives might be a mangled corpse not far away while he, the colonel, was blessed with good health and a fair share of brains.

He suddenly roused himself to the situation of the hour and strode to the door.

Broadcloth Burt and Alice had been gone several minutes, and when Simon Sandbanks reached the starlight beyond the shanty door, he found himself alone.

"Thar's liable ter be an explosion in this town at any moment, an' I'll get hurt ef I stay," he continued. "The toughs may find Cap'n Colorado or the Mormon galoot carved all ter pieces somewhar. Then, if they should find me after thet, I wouldn't hev one chance in a million for life. Colonel, for you, safety lies out ov this mountain trap. I'll go to Denver an' play a full hand thar. Then, Broadcloth, I'll win the game you've blocked in Deadwood!"

He started off with the speed of a man eager to get out of the Black Hills capital.

Suddenly there rung out on the night air a wild exclamation which to him was a cry of discovery.

Colonel Sandbanks stopped in his tracks and held his breath.

"Thet means that they've found my victim," he said. "Now, Simon, legs ar' trumps, an' you must take everlastin' leave ov Deadwood."

The night wind blew against his face from that quarter of the town where he had left Captain Colorado after the desperate grapple between the two cabins, and it bore to his ears a chorus of mad oaths and human howls of rage.

"I was right! The Deadwood pards have found their cap'n. Now thar'll be a reign ov terror in this cut-throat district."

He started forward again, but the next moment a loud voice filled his ears.

"Let no guilty man escape! Colonel Sandbanks an' the Mormon spider entered Deadwood since sundown. Let the Thirty Toughs find and slay!"

The speaker could not have been more than twenty yards from the terrified fugitive, but he could not see him, nor did he recognize the voice.

"Great heavens! let me get out of this snap, an' I'll give this accursed town a wide berth hereafter," said the colonel. "They'll hem me in if I don't strike the Denver trail ahead ov them. I owe all ov this to you, Broadcloth Burt. You would not take me along to Denver. May an accident befall you 'an' land me there first!"

The man who now went toward the Denver trail ran like a frightened deer.

Fear lent speed to his limbs, and his feet at times hardly appeared to touch the ground.

Out of breath at last he halted beyond the suburbs of Deadwood, and recovered in the shadow of rock and tree.

"Born under an evil star by Jehosaphat!" he exclaimed. "Went overland in '49, tramped the gold trails fer ten years, got bu'sted an' kicked out ov camp, came to Deadwood, set up a hotel, got burned out, fell in love with a female, held the best hand twice, run ag'in' a pistol flush, an' hyar I am, still under the unlucky star—hunted by the worst set ov men thet ever hated a gentleman, an' in a durned bad fix generally. I'm disgusted, supremely disgusted. Homeless, an' hunted, an' fifty years old! By George, it's a burnin' shame!"

Colonel Sandbanks was one of those men who always grow indignant over their misfortunes.

He seemed to feel that the whole world was against him, and when he was hated and hunted by the merciless Deadwood toughs, might he not as well be wanted by an enraged world?

"A martyr to love, thet's what I am!" he continued. "By the shinin' stars above me! ef I could blow your head off, Broadcloth Burt an' finally win Alice, I'd be ther proudest man in Dakota. I'll make another effort. Pluck up courage, Simon Sandbanks. An' old 'forty-niner must never give up!"

Away he went again afoot down the eventful Denver trail.

No longer the curses of the Deadwood ruffians rung in his ears, but he could imagine the scenes that were transpiring there.

He knew that Captain Colorado had been found, that over him the Deadwood pards had registered a terrible oath of revenge, and that his name was being spoken in mad-tones and accompanied by curses.

"Even Alice couldn't coax me back into that death-trap!" he exclaimed, giving vent to his feelings while he pictured the scenes transpiring in Deadwood. "I've left the infernal den forever."

"That's sensible," said a voice so near the fugitive landlord that he started back with an ex-

clamation of terror. "I, too, have quit the town forevermore."

It was not until the last sentence was being uttered that Colonel Sandbanks saw the speaker.

"Ho! I know you!" he said. "Merciless Maud, what have you done with the Mormon spider?"

"Come and see," was the quick response.

The colonel did not stir, but a sudden stride landed the woman beside him, and she pointed down the trail.

"He isn't far off," she continued. "What! are you afraid to see the man who took you into the Deadwood death-trap at the pistol's muzzle?"

"No! Show me the way."

Maud the Merciless started off, followed by Simon Sandbanks, and after leading him over a narrow trail which left the main one and gradually ascended, she halted at the edge of a cliff, and pointed over the dark fringe of bushes.

"I don't see him," said the colonel, after a brief look into the chasm.

"He is there. Go nearer; don't be afraid. The ground will not leave your feet."

Encouraged by these words he crept to the very edge of the cliff.

He saw a tree which, having taken root in the bank, leaned over the dizzy height, and some distance below it an object hung suspended in mid-air.

Simon Sandbanks gazed for a moment, and then started back with a low gasp of horror.

"I did it all!" she said, in tones full of implacable hatred as her eyes burned like brilliant diamonds. "I forced him out on the tree, with the noose around his neck, and then, as a pistol-ball spun through his shoulder, he dropped. It is Maud's revenge. The Mormon wife has reached the end of her trail. The man who plotted with the Mormon viper to blight her life lies mutilated in his cabin, and the serpent himself hangs yonder in the light of the stars that first heard the wife's oath. I have yet one deed to do."

"What is that?"

"You will learn by and by. My new game begins in Denver."

"So does mine," was the response. "Hark! as I live, thar ar' hosses down yonder on the trail!"

"Yes," said the avenger. "The Deadwood toughs are in the saddle again. They want us, Colonel Sandbanks."

"And Broadcloth, too! How soon they get him I don't care a continental, but as for Simon Sandbanks, he'll never fall alive into their hands. Thar'll yet be fun 'twixt hyer an' Denver!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

ONE AGAINST TWENTY.

THE Deadwood toughs had failed to find the persons wanted within the limits of the town.

The finding of Captain Colorado between the cabins, and desperately wounded, had disclosed the fact that when closely pressed Simon Sandbanks would fight.

There was a bare chance for Colorado, and having carried him into the Full-Hand Casino, the toughs at once inaugurated a hunt for the colonel, and whoever else might come into their net.

Deadwood was thoroughly searched, but without result, and then the cry of "to saddle!" was raised and there was a dash for the Denver trail.

It was the sound of their galloping that reached the ears of Colonel Sandbanks and Maud the Merciless as they stood on the precipice so fatal to the Mormon spider, some distance above the Denver road.

"Now let us get behind the gang," said the colonel. "We'll be safe thar, for they've passed on like a cyclone. They've got inter their heads that I'm ridin' a good hoss ter Denver, an' they'll not stop this side ov that city ef they don't find me."

Maud said nothing, but with a glance at the body swinging slowly back and forth over the deep canyon, drew back, and led the way toward the trail below.

Meanwhile the Deadwooders, twenty in number, and armed to the teeth, had passed on like a human whirlwind, as if eager to overtake some one ahead.

They evidently argued that as neither Alice nor Colonel Sandbanks were to be found in Deadwood, they were somewhere on the Denver trail and could be overtaken.

Denver was Deadwood's acknowledged rival, and it was natural to suppose that the fugitives had sought it.

But there was on that trail at that very moment a certain person about whom the Deadwooders thought but little at the time.

This individual was a man of handsome figure, long black hair, and pleasant of countenance.

He sat on a horse at a spot where the Denver trail made an abrupt angle, and looked and listened toward Deadwood with a cocked revolver in his right hand.

Once before he had ridden down the trail since sundown, but an unforeseen event had sent him back to Deadwood.

The sudden springing of a bear into the trail had turned two horses about, and one, frightened almost to death, had dashed back, carrying a fair young girl whose fingers had closed with a death-grasp upon a bunch of mane.

Perhaps the horseman in the starlit trail thought of this while he occupied his saddle as immovable as a statue; he had plenty of time to recall the accident, his own return to Deadwood in time to confront Colonel Sandbanks with a beautiful girl in his arms.

"Denver is a long way off," he murmured. "I have sworn to restore the girl to her mother and I must do it. We will be followed by the Deadwood wolves and they might as well be met first as last. We might as well fight it out here where I have the advantage. Paradise Paul declared that it should be war to the knife and I am willing. I told Alice that I would wait an hour for them here. If they do not come, we will go on to Denver."

The Denver sport had not been brought to bay, but he knew that the game had not yet been played to its close, and it was for the Deadwood toughs that he waited on the trail.

He was still the handsome sport with the waxed mustache and glossy hair; he had discarded his kids; that was all the change he had made in his dress since his first coming to Deadwood.

His hour had nearly expired when his eyes brightened and his lips parted suddenly:

"They're coming at last!" he said. "Now, my Deadwood heroes, for the last tussle!"

His keen ears had caught a sound which among the echo lands of Dakota, precedes some distance the gallop of a horse.

It gave him ample time for preparation, but that he did not need; he was already prepared. The last tussle!

After that he could proceed to Denver, he could take Captain Paul's ward to the arms of her mother, he could witness the joyful reunion and read his reward in the widow's tears.

Had Broadcloth Burt ever thought for a moment of a different reward?

If he was a wife-hunter as the Mormon spider had been, he had never breathed a word of it to Alice.

Chivalrous to the core, the man from Denver saw only the waiting woman there and had heard the story of a lost child with an inward resolve to search her out and bring her home.

He had discovered by accident that the belle of Deadwood was the right one, and from that discovery his oath to rescue was dated.

Nothing had daunted the Denverite.

The pages of our story have told how he invaded Deadwood, how he met its desperate band, how, on more than one occasion, he faced them all, how he twice rescued Timothy Ten-wives from the noose in order that one who had suffered at his hands might avenge her wrongs, and how he had triumphed at last, and was on the way back with the missing one.

No reward of gold had prompted this cool man—nothing, save the story of one who had waited many years for her child.

And as Broadcloth Burt sat on the Denver trail and leaned toward Deadwood, listening, he must have renewed his adventures, his hunts for Alice, his narrow escapes, his fights for her.

He knew that the sounds which had saluted his ears were those of the desperadoes he had faced before, and he even waited for them with a smile.

Where was Alice?

Not far away, you may depend, reader, and ready to continue the fight at his command.

"There must be twenty, all that the Mormon spared," ejaculated Broadcloth Burt. "They'd get up a picnic if they got to Denver, and they're mad enough to ride plump into the city. However, I'll surprise 'em within the next five minutes. They are not looking for me hyer."

On, on came the Deadwood toughs, filling the trail from side to side, and in no manner attempting to break the noise of their pursuit.

Stalwart fellows they were, in their dark shirts and swarthy skins, and every one splendidly mounted.

They looked neither to the right nor to the left, but took it for granted that those they wanted were not likely to be found this side of Denver, and while their horses were fresh, they might as well push on till dawn.

All at once there rung out a cry—a single word—that halted the whole band as if they had charged against a wall of stone.

"Stand!"

Throughout the band was heard the cocking of revolvers as the horses were forced back upon their haunches.

"I've got the drop on you, wolves of Deadwood!" followed the command in tones equally as stern. "You needn't go on to Denver to find the mau you're looking for. He is here!"

More than one Deadwooder knew that voice although they had not heard it often.

"It is Broadcloth Burt," passed from lip to lip in whispers. "We've struck the Denver snag ag'in."

Calmly in the saddle sat the sport with two revolvers poked forward over his steed's head.

He could see the men who forced him, for not more than ten yards separated them, and he

knew that he held them all at the mercy of his revolvers.

"We've got to fight it out somewhar," the Denverite went on. "It's twenty against one, but in my experience I've seen it that way before."

"So hev we, but never afore you struck Deadwood."

"Ha! then I astonished the mushroom town."

"I should say you did, Denver. But can't you see that you're a fool now? Those shootin'-boxes in yer hands carry but twelve balls an' thar's twenty ov us. Twenty ter one under these circumstances gives you no hope."

There was logic in the ruffian's words, but the man who heard them did not quail.

"Well," he said, "what are your terms?"

"The girl first! She b'longs ter Deadwood," The Denverite laughed.

"I thought you'd say that; but there never was a time when she belonged to Deadwood."

"Mebbe she's yours, then."

"She is her mother's," was the quick response.

"An' you hev sworn ter take her ter thet mother?"

"I have!"

"What d'yer think of ther chances now?"

"They're good."

"Come, Denver. Ef yer open on us some ov us will never ride back ter Deadwood, but thar's one man who will never escort ther Deadwood blossom inter Denver."

A defiant light had flashed up in the eyes of the Denver sport.

"Move yer arm an inch, Bart," whispered a rough in the rear rank to the comrade who sat on the horse ahead of him. "The bandbox sport doesn't see me, an' ef you'll move yer arm an' inch I'll tumble him over his horse's tail. Thar!"

The arm was moved and the Deadwooder lowered his gleaming eyes to a level with the revolver he gripped in his right hand.

"You mustn't miss, Tiger Tom," said Bart.

"Miss that human target? May I never be a Saint ef I fail ter hit ther dandy sport ov Denver town."

One man at least among the twenty toughs held his breath.

He knew that Broadcloth was being covered by one of the deadliest pistols of the wild northwest, for Tiger Tom was a crack shot.

"I've got the bead, Bart," came up to the listener's ears in a significant whisper. "Now watch the bandbox tumble."

With the last word there flashed a blinding light among the Black Hills toughs, and the Denver sport's lips parted with a cry as he reeled away.

"I always hit!" hissed Tiger Tom. "Now, pards, ride the devil down!"

But the Deadwooders were too surprised at the unexpected shot to act immediately on the command.

They saw that Broadcloth Burt had not fallen from his steed.

"Ride him down! thar may be shoot in him yet!" thundered Tiger Tom.

"Shoot" in him yet? There was.

All at once the man from Denver straightened in his saddle; then he leaned toward the bloodthirsty toughs.

"There's death in my hands!" he hissed. "I go to Denver with my prize, despite all the revolvers in the Black Hills!"

He was firing straight into the Deadwood tigers with two revolvers as he hissed the last sentence through clinched teeth.

The rapidity of the death-shots seemed to throw the whole band into confusion.

Men with revolvers uplifted reeled away, shot through the head, before they could touch the trigger.

Broadcloth Burt shot to kill, and he killed when he shot!

Before those slaying pistols the Deadwood pards seemed to forget that they were twenty against one.

"That's all—thanks!" suddenly cried the Denver sport, wheeling his steed. "That's the first lesson. When we meet again, we'll play the game through to the end!"

There was the clatter of hoofs down the Denver trail, and a flying object vanished in the brilliant starlight.

"Here I am!" said a man, as he drew rein alongside a young girl who waited for him in the saddle, a mile from the scene of the mad fight of one against twenty.

"I heard it all," was the answer; "and I thank Heaven you have escaped."

"I got away, but they drew blood," laughed the Denver sport. "A fellow in the rear rank gave me his compliments."

"You are wounded, then?" cried the girl.

"Half an ounce of lead in my shoulder—my Deadwood keepsake," was the reply; and leaning toward the head of the girl's steed, Broadcloth Burt firmly gripped the rein and held it, as they tore on side by side toward distant Denver.

"This is running from Deadwood. I don't like it a bit," he suddenly said. "But I guess Denver is ahead of the game thus far. I'll never be welcome in Deadwood after this."

Alice turned and looked into the cool man's face.

His mustache drooped, there was blood on his face, but his eyes twinkled merrily over his last remarks; and, as her heart throbbed wildly, she thought him the bravest man that ever lived.

And Broadcloth Burt?

He returned the look with interest, and for several moments they looked at one another, speaking not.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DENVER'S VICTORY.

SCATTERED right and left by the rapid shooting of Broadcloth Burt, the Deadwood toughs were not ready to pursue until the oath-bound sport and his companion had put more than a mile between them.

"Let them go to Denver," grated the baffled ruffians. "One of these days Deadwood will show up in that town, an' thar'll be somebody hurt. Bury the dead an' ride back ter ther old town. By the gods! that demon killed when he shot!"

The truth of the last expression was quite apparent, for there were a number of human forms on the trails, men who would terrorize the Black Hills country no more.

With muttered curses the Deadwooders picked up their fallen comrades, and laid them away behind the huge boulders that fringed the Denver trail at that point; then, with diminished ranks, they turned their horses' heads toward the north and galloped away.

Sooner than they expected they had found the dead-shot from Denver, and he had arrested their progress in a manner which would long be a topic of interest at the Full-Hand and kindred places.

Once more the galloping of their steeds awoke the echoes of the waning night as they plied spur in the race to Deadwood.

"Hark! listen! they're comin' back!" said a man who stood behind a clump of trees near the trail and looked into a woman's face.

"Let them come," was the fearless reply. "They will have it their own way in Deadwood from to-night."

"Wouldn't I like to pour it into them!"

"You?"

"Why shouldn't I? Didn't they tear me from their captain's throat an' try to grind me into powder under their boot-heels? Look at my face. I'll never regain my good looks, but I've got more sense than I had then."

"In what way?"

"I was a fool for attackin' Captain Paul in the midst ov Deadwood's hard crowd, but I was passion blinded. I was lucky to get off with my life. They took a vote with me lyin' bruised under their feet an' thar was a majority ov one fer keepin' me until Paradise Paul recovered. The rest voted for carvin' me up thar an' then. If thet warn't a close shave, set Colonel Sandbanks down for a loon."

Maud the Merciless did not pay much attention to the voluble Sandbanks, but continued to listen to the rough riders galloping over the trail.

"I'd like to pour it into 'em, I say," repeated the colonel.

"Are you in earnest?" asked the avenger turning suddenly and looking into the landlord's face.

"Try me!"

The next moment the Mormon wife extended two revolvers toward him.

"Here," she said. "Glide down to the trail yonder, and take your revenge."

Simon Sandbanks looked at the weapons, then gazed at the Mormon and recoiled with a light ejaculation of fear, that brought a gleam of contempt into Maud's eyes.

"Aba! you were joking!" exclaimed the woman. "You don't want to hurt the Deadwood toughs. You have already forgotten their boot-heels. They'll laugh at you in the Casino."

"They shall never do that!" ejaculated Sandbanks, snatching the weapons from Maud's hands. "You think I'm afraid ov the Black Hills ruffians that are ridin' yonder? By Heavens! I'll show them that they've stepped on the wrong man!"

Merciless Maud watched Sandbanks narrowly and with great curiosity as he stepped toward the trail itself, a cocked revolver in each hand.

Was his old courage which was spasmodic in its actions, actually coming back, or would he shrink from the attack?

He reached the Denver trail, and Merciless Maud saw him lean over the rocks and look southward as he waited for the Black Hills toughs.

"He means it!" exclaimed the Mormon wife. "He means to empty the pistols among the Deadwood ravens. They will shoot him to pieces!"

She heard the very curses of the Deadwooders who swore roundly as they came on, but saw only the dark figure among the rocks with two death batteries at his command.

Colonel Sandbanks did not hear her until she

reached his side, and perhaps her voice and touch were the first proofs of her earnestness.

"My God! you do mean to pit yourself against those men?"

"You have dared me," was the retort as he shook her loose. "I'm easily scared at times, but now that ain't a drop of coward blood in me!"

"But they will make a sieve out of you."

"Not while I kin shoot. Stand back and give the old 'forty-niner a show."

Merciless Maud was not disposed to desert the late proprietor of the Setemup, but he would hear to nothing.

"You gave me these shootin'-machines to annihilate the Deadwood toughs, an' I'm goin' ter use 'em for that purpose!" he grated. "Stand back an' see some of the daisiest tumbling ever witnessed on ther Denver trail."

The woman gave him a final look and stepped back.

While the courageous fit was on, nothing could turn Simon Sandbanks from his purpose.

He sent a flashing look down the trail and raised the revolvers as more than a dozen horsemen dashed into view.

"Now, my Black Hills beauties, take this for the boot-marks on Simon Sandbanks's epidermis!" and as Maud, the Merciless, shrunk still further from the spot, the bright flashes of two pistols, and the sudden halt of the galloping posse, told that death was again at work on the Denver trail.

Almost as rapidly as Broadcloth Burt had worked his revolvers further down that very trail, and only a little while before, the colonel emptied his into the ranks of the Deadwood toughs.

Men went backward before the deadly flashes, and others with yells and curses fired among the boulders.

It was a scene of indescribable confusion, which Simon Sandbanks with teeth hard set increased by his rapid shots.

All the while twenty feet away Maud, the Merciless, waited for the end.

She expected to see the roughs dismount and charge the man among the rocks; but she was disappointed, for all at once the decimated band swept on leaving the colonel in possession of the field.

"You thought I war jokin', eh?" said the man who suddenly appeared to her. "Go down yonder an' look at the withered daisies in the road."

There was a smile on the face and a victorious gleam in the eyes of the man who pointed toward the trail as he uttered the last sentence.

"I will take your word for it," the woman said. "Listen! Those fellows will not stop till they pull up before the Full-Hand."

"Thar's precious few of 'em goin' back, not enough for a good treat," laughed the colonel handing the revolvers back. "Two weeks ago I war a peaceful citizen of Deadwood; now my hide wouldn't hold sand ef I war back thar five minutes. Wal, times change suddenly in these parts," and the speaker sighed.

"Are you satisfied now?" asked Maud.

"Yes, an' I feel better. Come; are you goin' to Denver?"

"Yes."

"Let us be off, then."

"What takes you thither?"

"Don't you know?"

"I might guess."

"Well?"

"You still hope to make that girl your wife, but let me tell you, Colonel Sandbanks, that such an event will never take place."

The colonel started back with an exclamation. "I have sworn ter!" he said. "She couldn't get a better husband than Simon Sandbanks. I'm no slouch ef I am a relic of '49."

"But there stands between that girl and you an unsurmountable barrier."

"Who's that?"

"Broadcloth Burt."

"I thought you'd name that bandbox sport; but I'll fight it out with him."

"You!" exclaimed Maud, contemptuously.

"Ef he expects ter win Alice, the fight's hardly over. He entered Deadwood with kids on his hands, but circumstances made him take 'em off. I go ter Denver with bare hands, an' stripped fer ther fray."

"You'd better not. I know something of that man."

"Wal, I'll give him a tussle, anyway." And Colonel Sandbanks turned his back on the woman at his side.

Toward the close of a day just one week after the events just narrated, a handsome man walked up behind another on the streets of Denver and laid his hand on his shoulder.

The man touched turned in a flash and instantly recoiled a foot.

"I understand that you want to see me!" said the person who had touched him.

"I—I—? no, sir? I don't know you, sir. There must be some mistake."

"Isn't your name Sandbanks?" and the eyes of the speaker almost looked the poor colonel through.

"Sandbanks? That is my name, but—"

"Simon Sandbanks?"

"No, sir. I'm Joshua Sandbanks, from Romeo City. My brother Simon in Deadwood greatly resembles me. In fact, sir, we are twins—twins, sir."

"Pardon me, then. I understood that Simon Sandbanks was looking for me, and I thought I would tell him that I was at his service. If you see your brother tell him for me that I want to see him."

"I will."

Once more the landlord of the unlucky Setemup was alone, but his eyes were riveted on the man walking off, and cold sweat stood out on his temples.

"Great Jehosaphat! I haven't been in Denver an' hour, an' he's lookin' for me already!" he exclaimed. "Thet twin-brother dodge popped into my head just in time to save my life. Broadcloth Burt, you kin take the gal. I never wanted her very bad, nohow. I'll git out of this one-hoss city an' see if I can't settle down whar peace reigns supreme. I'm ther identical an' only Simon Sandbanks. I never hed a twin-brother, Broadcloth Burt."

A short distance away the Denver sport was laughing to himself.

Colonel Sandbanks had not deceived him, and as the Denverite was not disposed to injure the man he did not fear, he let the colonel depart unmolested.

Thus did Simon Sandbanks find Broadcloth Burt in Denver, and thus did his courage vanish in the presence of the oath-bound sport.

We have passed over the happy reunion which the Denverite had brought about, and the reader will pardon us if we do not describe it here.

There remains for us to say that Alice, the belle of Deadwood, was folded once more to the heart of the patient mother, and that her thanks more than rewarded Broadcloth Burt.

Time rewarded him still better, for Alice, as a natural sequence, became his wife.

Merciless Maud had intended to invade Denver and abduct Alice, but she suddenly gave up her intentions and mysteriously disappeared.

Her trail had ended over the dangling body of the Mormon spider, and from the night of her terrible revenge she ceased to be a character in any real life drama.

As a band, the Thirty Toughs of Deadwood no longer existed.

After burying Paradise Paul and Colorado Clate, their lost leaders, the few left by the revolvers so well handled by the colonel and Broadcloth Burt, drifted from Deadwood, each to play his part in some desperate game among the gold and silver hills.

As for the colonel, we may say that time healed his disappointment, and that, after making love successfully to a Mexican damsel, he opened a new hotel on the southwest border, where I believe he flourishes at the present time.

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